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LITERARY STUDIES BY WALTER BAGEHOT VOLUME 1

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INTRODUCTION

THE writer of literary miscellanies is a suspected person. For casual skimming in a weekly or monthly review he is all very well; but has he any right to the comparative eternity of publishers' cloth? His matter smells of the common-place book, his method suggests the pump-handle. He thinks in paragraphs, sorts the world into pages, and sees men as columns walking. We doubt his authority; he writes, but does he know? The first essential of good writing is the having of something to say, a condition often unfulfilled in the case of the miscellaneous author. Knowledge is the mother of eloquence in literature, just as, unfortunately, necessity is the mother of invention. If you are to transfer something of life into your book, you must know life and not merely the vital statistics accessible in the books of others. An original writer is inspired by life, an imitative author by literature. The one reports at first hand, the other at second, or fifth, hand. The work of the one is vital, the work of the other vitiated by inbreeding and the consumption of breathed air. Thus the better part of the world prefers its men of letters to be men of experience as well, and not mere literary dilettanti who shrink from contact with reality. How far the preference is sound can be decided by a rapid review of the varied, and sometimes tumultuous careers of many great writers.

Now this is specially applicable to the case of Walter Bagehot, first because he was a miscellaneous writer who has survived by his fitness, next because he happened to be a distinguished man of affairs as well as a distinguished man of letters, and next because he has expressed, in his own incisive way, the general sense of the world in such matters. Shakespeare is to him a type of the "experiencing mind" with a store of first-hand observation as material, while Southey represents the mere man of letters, the literary manufacturer, who lived in a vacuum, and with painful industry wrote poetry before breakfast, philosophy before lunch, and history before dinner. Certainly there was no keener man of the world than Bagehot himself. He knew men, he knew politics, he knew business; and that knowledge is revealed in all he wrote. His essays are alive because he was alive; his financial theory is intelligent because he was a financier in practice; and his constitutional philosophy is sound because he knew both politics and politicians. Without "the vision and

the faculty divine," mere experience is of course almost valueless in literature; but with "the accomplishment of words," experience makes a powerful combination.

Bagehot (whose name, by the way, should be pronounced as if written "Bagot") was born at Langport in Somerset on Feb. 3, 1826, of distinguished banking lineage. His father was managing director and vice-chairman of the famous Stuckey's Bank, whose notes were so familiar in the West of England that true Somerset men have been known to reject the foreign and suspicious paper of Threadneedle Street and to demand payment "in Stuckey." Indeed, there was finance on both sides of the family, for his mother was also a Stuckey; and she contributed to the joint stock not only further banking traditions, but a highly cultivated interest of her own and of her relatives in scientific inquiry and pursuits. The future author of "Physics and Politics" certainly owed much of his keen interest in scientific speculation to the influence of his maternal relatives. He was educated first at a Bristol school, and then at University College, London, where one of his friends was R. H. Hutton, afterwards editor of the "Spectator," whose charming memorial essay is the chief authority for details of Bagehot's life. He took the mathematical scholarship with his Bachelor's degree at London University in 1846, and the gold medal in Intellectual and Moral Philosophy with his Master's degree two years later. These distinctions indicate some of the predilections and influences of his youth, but, as usual, much should be set down to the account of time and place. Bagehot's most impressionable years were spent in London and during the forties, with Cobden and Newman as the main lines of influence. The family Unitarianism that prevented him from going to Oxford must be counted as a fortunate circumstance; for to such a mind as Bagehot's the "now" of London was better than the "once" of Oxford. He did not, however, completely escape the influence of Oxford, for that lovely city with its remote and cloistral atmosphere was personified in John Henry Newman, whose winsome prose captivated Bagehot, as so many more, and compelled him to an interest in the problems that troubled Rome's most distinguished convert.

To a temperament like Bagehot's, the merely sentimental appeal of Rome counted for something, but not for much. That it had an effect certain verses remain to prove; but this disturbance is an almost inevitable phase—sometimes the first, sometimes the last phase—of the religious mind; and Bagehot's possession of a religious mind is proved by the fact that his views underwent a change. That the change, from the orthodox

point of view, was in the direction of breadth rather than intensity makes no difference. The unquestioning acceptance of a form of faith as a sort of geographical circumstance is a mark, not of the religious, but of the merely passive mind. The challenging and the changing of early religious prepossessions is at least a sign that the mind has been troubled by deep matters, and is anxious for the truth. While, then, the sentimental aspect of Rome had some effect upon Bagehot, the real secret of its attraction lay in the historical, the pragmatic glamour of the Catholic Church. Rome, to him, was a polity justified, on the whole, by its consequences. A constitutional system that had worked through a past of wonderful history and continued to work in a changed and changing present, would certainly seem to deserve the respect, and almost the adherence, of a mind predisposed to political considerations.

Fortunately, however, Newman was not the sole interest of his college years. London was ringing with the strife of Free Trade against Protection; and whatever else this question may have been, it was certainly actual and vital. Whether the Church of Rome was the rightful representative of the primitive apostolic foundation was no doubt an important matter; but whether bread should be too dear to buy had at least an appearance of superior urgency. It was a primitive question of a different kind. Bagehot and Hutton pursued Cobden and Bright and other Free Trade heroes in their oratorical progress, and diligently discussed their speeches by the standards of Chatham and Burke. The enthusiasm thus enkindled never died away. Free Trade remained with Bagehot as a real dynamic interest, the charm of Newman asserting itself rather as a sentimental, literary influence; so that, to take an instance of their divergence, Sir Robert Peel, who presently became little better than one of the ungodly to Newman and his kind, commanded Bagehot's increasing respect, and is the subject of appreciative consideration in one of his best essays.

In the friendship between Bagehot and that most tragic of Newman's disciples, Arthur Hugh Clough, something of the master's influence may perhaps be seen; but the common interest was philosophical rather than theological, and the connection was actually formed in the unecclesiastical atmosphere of University College, to which Clough had come as Principal of a hall of residence. Between Clough, with his cloistral instincts thwarted by sceptical convictions, and Bagehot, with his sanguine, practical interest in the world of men, there would seem, at first sight, to be no point of contact; but the philosophic quietism of Clough found an answer

in the younger man's instinctive dislike of extremes, especially of emotional extremes; and their actual literary practice suggests a further likeness. They were both serious men with a vein of humour that tinged their wisdom, now with gaiety and now with cynicism. The sardonic asides of the Literary Studies find a counterpart in such poems as "The Latest Decalogue"; and if Bagehot is one of our most high-spirited essayists, the "Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich" is one of our most pleasant pieces of poetic gaiety. The strength of the friendship is but feebly indicated in Bagehot's chilly essay on the poet, which has even more than the writer's usual restraint upon his feelings, and dissipates at the end, as if he were afraid of opening his heart, into a rather superfluous account of the "Amours de Voyage." For the truth about Clough it is not to this essay by one of his closest friends that we must turn.

In 1851 Bagehot went to Paris and lived through the stirring times of the coup d'état by which the President, Louis Napoleon, overthrew the Republic, and secured the perpetuation of his power under the title of Napoleon III, Emperor of the French. Bagehot's cynical and unexpected approval of this political crime was expressed in a series of letters that appalled his friends and almost extinguished the respectable Unitarian paper to which he had been rashly asked to contribute. He was not quite twenty-six; he was of the eager, sanguine temperament whose defect it is to run into cocksureness; his Liberalism (such as it was) did not at any time of his life exclude a whole-hearted contempt for the masses: hence his rather Nietzschean approval of Louis Napoleon—really a man of sawdust, yet, at the moment, strong enough, as it seemed, to tread down the mutable many who, being French, were silly precisely because they were not stupid. "I think M. Bonaparte," he writes in a letter to Hutton, "is entitled to great praise. He has very good heels to his boots, and the French just want treading down, and nothing else—calm, cruel, businesslike oppression, to take the dogmatic conceit out of their heads." And so, with characteristic cynicism, and with characteristic eagerness for experience, Bagehot helped the Republicans, whom he despised, to build barricades against the man whom he admired.

This episode of his early manhood is additional evidence of the hardness that somewhat mars his work—hardness, remember, not bluntness. His temper was of steel—keen, resilient, but undeniably hard. He seemed impatient of emotion and suspicious of any action born of its influence. He was, in fact,

an example of excessive rationalism; and the defect of excessive rationalism is that it is excessively unreasonable. Reason looks well on paper; but in reality we have scanty grounds for assuming that reason is a better guide to life than feeling. Reason is certainly triumphant, and feeling as certainly annihilated in the science with which, in his lifetime, Bagehot's name was specially connected. He was a financier and economist. While he admired Adam Smith, (upon whom he has written a very delightful essay), his respect for Ricardo was warmer still. Now the defect (or merit—so much depends upon point of view) of Ricardo and his school is that they dehumanised what is after all a matter of human concern. They wrote as if the world were peopled by man and not by men, and as if that world were the fictitious realm of pure mechanics, where elasticity is perfect, where friction is unknown, and where you may always neglect the weight of the elephant. Bagehot recognised quite fully this serious limitation of economic science, and defended it as a necessary method of inquiry. From that point of view he is right; but in this study, almost beyond any other, there is a constant temptation to take abstractions as realities. No one could live in the rigid, frictionless world of pure mechanics; yet people constantly talk, and even act, as if we did live in the world of pure economics. After all, the father of the science was wiser than his followers when he called his treatise "The Wealth of Nations," and considered his subject, not as a separate entity, but as a mere aspect of the whole human science into the scheme of which he tried to fit it. Bagehot suffered from economic degeneration of the heart. For the "still, sad music of humanity" he had no ear. Shakespeare's scorn of the rude mechanicals is music to him, and in any discussion of capital and labour, he is not only on the side of capital—as he might reasonably be, but he is patently contemptuous of labour, as no true economist should be. Here again the abstractions of science are a source of confusion. Much of the absurdity that results from argument about capital and labour is due to our incorrigible dialectic habit of dividing things into two abstract and mutually exclusive parts, and then assuming that the abstractions are facts. Labour does no more in the world's work, Bagehot argues in the "Economic Studies," than the compositors do in producing "The Times"; whereas Capital is like the editor who, by shaping a policy, choosing this, and rejecting that, actually makes the paper. This would be a hard world for most of us, if we had to be judged by our metaphors; but that Bagehot was satisfied with such an illustration shows the depth of unreality into which a pure economist can sink; for

he overlooks not only the fact that the editor, as such, is already part of the labour, but this: that if the editor could (as in fact he cannot) dispense with all assistance, and produce and distribute the paper single-handed, he would cease to be part of the labour, and become all of it. The economist, even more than the author, is a person who lives in a vacuum and takes no account of mankind.

Bagehot had at first intended to practise at the Bar, to which he was called in 1852; but during his stay in Paris he abandoned the career of "law and bad jokes till we are forty" (as Dizzy has it), and began serious work at the family calling. Business, he said, is more amusing than pleasure; and he gravely declared that dabbling his hands in a heap of sovereigns was a certain cure for the megrims. His amusing business fortunately did not engross all his energies, for he found time to write a series of articles for the "Prospective Review" and the "National" —the latter of which he assisted in editing. His marriage in 1858 to a daughter of the Right Hon. James Wilson, founder of the "Economist," was a factor of much importance in his life; for, apart from the domestic happiness that ensued, the connection with Wilson gave him an inside intimacy with the world of high politics. When his father-in-law went to India as Financial Member of the Council, Bagehot succeeded him in the editorial chair of the "Economist," and held it till his own death in 1877. Politics had always been a strong interest of the Bagehot family; moreover politics and finance are near neighbours—when they are not the same thing. As editor of the "Economist" Bagehot came into closer touch with the machine and gained the knowledge of its working that helps to give his little book on the Constitution a classic authority.

This book—it is really a series of essays—is one to read. Bagehot wrote, not for bookish students or hermit historians, but for "such a being as man in such a world as the present." The morphology of the Constitution, a most fascinating study, he left to the theorists. His essays describe, not how we grew, but where we stand—two different things that are sometimes confused in the treatises. The reader of the book as it now appears should not begin at the beginning—or, rather, he should begin at the original and not at the present beginning. Bagehot wrote it in the middle sixties before Dizzy's great "leap in the dark"; and when the new franchise had been in operation for some years, he reissued the volume with an elaborate introduction criticising the probable developments of artisan suffrage. The reader will do well to leave this introduction till last, and begin with the admirable essay on the Cabinet. The book naturally

dates a little, but less than one might suppose. It is woefully wrong, however, in its forecast of a House of Commons under democratic suffrage. Since Bagehot wrote there have been two great extensions of the franchise, but no House of Commons has at all resembled his vision; and though he foresaw the increased influence of the licensed house in politics, he did not foresee the side that the workman's "pub." has actually taken. Some passages, too, are weakened by the overuse of abstractions. Thus, he criticises the democratic ideal of "one man one vote" in the usual terms: "The rich and wise are not to have, by explicit law, more votes than the poor and stupid"—and so on. Such criticism is meaningless, as the terms "rich and poor," "wise and stupid," beg the whole question, and leave us precisely where we were. Try to define "rich and poor," "wise and stupid," for the purpose of limiting the franchise, and the futility of conducting an argument with these mere counters of thought will become evident. However, the book as a whole deals with facts, not with figments, and in the main can never be superseded.

There is little more to say of Bagehot's external life. He tried more than once to get into Parliament, but was never actually returned. On the whole this is well. He belonged really to neither of the great parties. He was, to use his own phrase, "between sizes in politics." He was a vigorous Free Trader and could never have worked with a Tory party that still hankered after Protection, and he was too remote from sympathy with democracy ever to have been a good Liberal. For us this detachment is pure gain, and makes him, in his political essays, the friendly foe of Conservatives and the "damned good-natured friend" of Liberals. His robust mind was housed in an apparently robust body—though far less robust than was imagined, for he died suddenly on March 24, 1877, at the early age of fifty-one.

Bagehot's work has the brilliance of a diamond; but it has also its adamantine hardness. This is generally a defect of the critical spirit. Where criticism ends and creation begins would evade the nicest of definitions. In a sense, all literature is criticism, since it is an account of how life strikes an observer. Learned gentlemen of the academic type, accustomed to the pigeon-holing of literature, have been driven to querulous discontent by Matthew Arnold's dictum that poetry is a criticism of life. But Arnold's judgment was sound, and was wrong only in being restricted. Not poetry alone, but all literature, all great literature, is a criticism of life. However, though we may not be able to state the difference in a definition, yet we

feel that there is a kind of literature that is critical rather than creative. To the category of criticism all Bagehot's work belongs. He is the purely critical spirit of the mid-Victorian era as Samuel Butler was of its close. To borrow a phrase from his own world, he audited the accounts of politics and letters, and wrote a vigorous report on the balance or deficit. Now the perfect accountant is passionless, and therefore sometimes grotesquely wrong. Not long ago, a government auditor, in reviewing the accounts of an education authority responsible for the feeding of necessitous children, reported adversely upon the expenditure of money in apples and bananas. A child, it appeared, might have an apple in a dumpling, for that was food and therefore a necessity; but not an apple by itself, for that was fruit and therefore a luxury. It is in just such a way as this that the critical spirit goes wrong. As a general fact, no writer creates according to rule—those who, like Wordsworth, think they do, being unaware of the difference between their impulses and their intentions; but many writers criticise according to rules, and have thereby brought criticism at times into a contempt that might have killed it, if the passion for sitting in judgment had not been as eternal in the human breast as hope. The man or book that fulfils the requirements of a priori criticism is generally salt that has not lost, but has never had, a savour. Thus Bagehot thought nothing of Abraham Lincoln and a great deal of Sir George Lewis. Here I am afraid it is necessary to warn a present-day reader against thinking immediately of Ely Place and society scandal. The Sir George Lewis of Bagehot's admiration was not the eminent solicitor, but Sir George Cornewall Lewis, author of treatises on ancient astronomy, ancient history and ancient languages; Secretary to the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and War Secretary in successive Palmerston ministries, and altogether as completely dead as it is possible for a departed statesman to be. Such are the idols that rationalist criticism sets up for worship. Bagehot was at fault, too, with greater men. While he says true things of Disraeli, he talks of that statesman's lack of influence over Englishmen in terms that every Primrose Day disproves; and his forecast of Gladstone's future certainly contains no hint of the now almost legendary "Grand Old Man." Bagehot's auditing of literary and political accounts is undeniably vigorous, and with complete impartiality he was ready to vivisect his friends as if he loved them. Yet it is well to remind ourselves that the man who is moved by his feelings is not commonly more at fault than the man who is moved by his logic, and he has the advantage of being wrong more amiably.

But all this is the defect and not the essence of Bagehot's quality. In actual fact he is the most inspiriting of writers, as full of humour as of wisdom. No truer thing could be said of him than the remark, quoted by Hutton, that he made one either think or laugh,—usually both. He has all Macaulay's clearness, and if he has less than Macaulay's force, he has more than Macaulay's humour, and more than Macaulay's depth. He is a genuinely original writer, with a power of showing his subject from new standpoints. You have seen pictures of cathedral interiors with central aisle bisecting the nave into precisely similar halves and leading straight to a tiny altar in the middle of the composition. Bagehot gives you no such view. His, rather, is the art that reveals a subject in illuminative glimpses from unexpected corners—here a strange vista, there a remote tomb, here the quaintly chiselled saint, there the incongruous gargoyle. The image is heavy, but it will serve; for in all he wrote there is an element of the unexpected. His bright phrases flash not only on the surface but into the depths of his subject. As an essayist (and he is essentially that) Bagehot's popularity is perceptibly increasing. He has, in a degree quite remarkable in an Englishman, the quality that the French call "esprit"; and, like the French, he was not afraid to use in writing the cultivated spoken language of his countrymen. Indeed, many passages of the essays have all the easy intimacy and sparkle of first-rate conversation, as far removed from the pompous and the forced as from the slangy and the slip-shod. But he is not merely amusing. His note of mingled gravity and levity is quite his own. He can be as cynical and worldly as you please, as in his vivid letters on the coup d'état, and just as other-worldly in the essays and asides that touch upon the perilous topics of faith and morals. He is thus a grateful writer to the ordinary man. We are neither beasts nor angels. Our feet are planted on the earth, but our eyes scan the heavens; and so we are glad of a writer who knows our limitations and our aspirations and is kind to both.

GEORGE SAMPSON

The following is a list of the works of Walter Bagehot:—

Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen (from *National Review*), 1858; republished in *Literary Studies*, 1878. On Parliamentary Reform (with additions from *National Review*), 1859, 1883; History of the Unreformed Parliament and its Lessons (from *National Review*), 1860; Memoir of the Rt. Hon. J. Wilson (from *Economist*), 1861; Count your Revenues and Economise your Expenditure, 1862; The English Constitution (from *Fortnightly*), 1867; New edition, with additions, 1872; in "Nelson's Shilling Library," 1910; A Practical Plan for Assimilating the English and American Money, etc., 1869, 1889; Physics and Politics ("International Scientific Series,") 1872; Lombard Street: a description of the Money Market, four editions in 1873, new ed. 1910; Depreciation of Silver (from *Economist*), 1877. Economic Studies (1880), and Biographical Studies from *National Review* and *Fortnightly* (1881); Students' Edition of "Postulates of Political Economy" from "Economic Studies" (1885). Bagehot contributed to the *Inquirer*, the *Economist*, the *Prospective Review*, the *Fortnightly*, and the *National Review*, of which he was joint editor, 1855, etc.

Works: Ed. F. Morgan, with Memoirs by R. H. Hutton, 5 vols., 1889; *Literary Studies*, ed. by R. H. Hutton, with Memoirs, 1879; 3rd ed. 1884, 4th ed. 1891, 1895, 1905, re-issue of Vol. III. with additions and with Prefatory Note by E. Bagehot, 1906; *Economic Studies*, ed. R. H. Hutton, 1880, 1888, 1895, 7th edition, 1908; *Biographical Studies*, ed. R. H. Hutton, 1881, 1895, 1907; *Estimations in Criticism*, ed. C. Lennox, 1908.

Life: Memoirs prefixed to *Works*, and to *Literary Studies; Walter Bagehot, in Memoriam:* A Collection of Obituary Notices, 1878.

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LITERARY STUDIES

The First Edinburgh Reviewers*

(1855)

It is odd to hear that the Edinburgh Review was once thought an incendiary publication. A young generation, which has always regarded the appearance of that periodical as a grave constitutional event (and been told that its composition is entrusted to Privy Councillors only), can scarcely believe, that once grave gentlemen kicked it out of doors—that the dignified classes murmured at 'those young men' starting such views, abetting such tendencies, using *such* expressions—that aged men said, 'Very clever, but not at all sound.' Venerable men too exaggerate. People say the review was planned in a garret, but this is incredible. Merely to take such a work into a garret would be inconsistent with propriety; and the tale that the original conception, the pure idea to which each number is a quarterly aspiration, ever was in a garret is the evident fiction of reminiscent age—striving and failing to remember.

Review writing is one of the features of modern literature. Many able men really give themselves up to it. Comments on ancient writings are scarcely so common as formerly; no great part of our literary talent is devoted to the illustration of the ancient masters; but what seems at first sight less dignified, annotation on modern writings was never so frequent. Hazlitt

**A Memoir of the Rev. Sydney Smith.* By his Daughter, Lady Holland. With a Selection from his Letters. Edited by Mrs. Austin. 2 vols. Longman.

Lord Jeffrey's Contributions to the Edinburgh Review. A new Edition in one volume. Longman.

Lord Brougham's Collected Works. Vols. I. II. III. *Lives of Philosophers of the Reign of George III. Lives of Men of Letters of the Reign of George III. Historical Sketches of the Statesmen who flourished in the Reign of George III.* Griffin.

The Rev. Sydney Smith's Miscellaneous Works. Including his Contributions to the Edinburgh Review. Longman.

started the question, whether it would not be as well to review works which did not appear, in lieu of those which did—wishing, as a reviewer, to escape the labour of perusing print, and, as a man, to save his fellow-creatures from the slow torture of tedious extracts. But, though approximations may frequently be noticed—though the neglect of authors and independence of critics are on the increase—this conception, in its grandeur, has never been carried out. We are surprised at first sight, that writers should wish to comment on one another; it appears a tedious mode of stating opinions, and a needless confusion of personal facts with abstract arguments; and some, especially authors who have been censured, say that the cause is laziness —that it is easier to write a review than a book—and that reviewers are, as Coleridge declared, a species of maggots, inferior to bookworms, living on the delicious brains of real genius. Indeed it *would* be very nice, but our world is so imperfect. This idea is wholly false. Doubtless it is easier to write one review than one book: but not, which is the real case, many reviews than one book. A deeper cause must be looked for.

In truth review-writing but exemplifies the casual character of modern literature. Everything about it is temporary and fragmentary. Look at a railway stall; you see books of every colour, blue, yellow, crimson, 'ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted,' on every subject, in every style, of every opinion, with every conceivable difference, celestial or sublunary, maleficent, beneficent—but all small. People take their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey. The volumes at least, you can see clearly, are not intended to be everlasting. It may be all very well for a pure essence like poetry to be immortal in a perishable world; it has no feeling; but paper cannot endure it, paste cannot bear it, string has no heart for it. The race has made up its mind to be fugitive, as well as minute. What a change from the ancient volume!—

> 'That weight of wood, with leathern coat o'erlaid,
> Those ample clasps, of solid metal made;
> The close-press'd leaves, unoped for many an age,
> The dull red edging of the well-fill'd page;
> On the broad back the stubborn ridges roll'd,
> Where yet the title stands in tarnish'd gold.'

And the change in the appearance of books has been accom-

panied—has been caused—by a similar change in readers. What a transition from the student of former ages!—from a grave man, with grave cheeks and a considerate eye, who spends his life in study, has no interest in the outward world, hears nothing of its din, and cares nothing for its honours, who would gladly learn and gladly teach, whose whole soul is taken up with a few books of 'Aristotle and his Philosophy,' to the merchant in the railway, with a head full of sums, an idea that tallow is 'up,' a conviction that teas are 'lively,' and a mind reverting perpetually from the little volume which he reads to these mundane topics, to the railway, to the shares, to the buying and bargaining universe. We must not wonder that the outside of books is so different, when the inner nature of those for whom they are written is so changed.

It is, indeed, a peculiarity of our times, that we must instruct so many persons. On politics, on religion, on all less important topics still more, everyone thinks himself competent to think, —in some casual manner does think,—to the best of our means must be taught to think rightly. Even if we had a profound and far-seeing statesman, his deep ideas and long-reaching vision would be useless to us, unless we could impart a confidence in them to the mass of influential persons, to the unelected Commons, the unchosen Council, who assist at the deliberations of the nation. In religion the appeal now is not to the technicalities of scholars, or the fictions of recluse schoolmen, but to the deep feelings, the sure sentiments, the painful strivings of all who think and hope. And this appeal to the many necessarily brings with it a consequence. We must speak to the many so that they will listen,—that they will like to listen,—that they will understand. It is of no use addressing them with the forms of science, or the rigour of accuracy, or the tedium of exhaustive discussion. The multitude are impatient of system, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality. They agree with Sydney Smith: 'Political economy has become, in the hands of Malthus and Ricardo, a school of metaphysics. All seem agreed what is to be done; the contention is, how the subject is to be divided and defined. *Meddle with no such matters.*' We are not sneering at 'the last of the sciences;' we are concerned with the essential doctrine, and not with the particular instance. Such is the taste of mankind.

We may repeat ourselves.

There is, as yet, no Act of Parliament compelling a *bona fide* traveller to read. If you wish him to read, you must make reading pleasant. You must give him short views, and clear sentences. It will not answer to explain what all the things which you describe, are *not*. You must begin by saying what they are. There is exactly the difference between the books of this age, and those of a more laborious age, that we feel between the lecture of a professor and the talk of the man of the world—the former profound, systematic, suggesting all arguments, analysing all difficulties, discussing all doubts,—very admirable, a little tedious, slowly winding an elaborate way, the characteristic effort of one who has hived wisdom during many studious years, agreeable to such as he is, anything but agreeable to such as he is not—the latter, the talk of the manifold talker, glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in a jest, unfolding unanswerable arguments in an absurd illustration, expounding nothing, completing nothing, exhausting nothing, yet really suggesting the lessons of a wider experience, embodying the results of a more finely tested philosophy, passing with a more Shakesperian transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low, in season and out of season, with a word of illustration for each and a touch of humour intelligible to all,—fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends, disconnected yet impressing what he maintains. This is the very model of our modern writing. The man of the modern world is used to speak what the modern world will hear; the writer of the modern world must write what that world will indulgently and pleasantly peruse.

In this transition from ancient writing to modern, the review-like essay and the essay-like review fill a large space. Their small bulk, their slight pretension to systematic completeness, their avowal, it might be said, of necessary incompleteness, the facility of changing the subject, of selecting points to attack, of exposing only the best corner for defence, are great temptations. Still greater is the advantage of 'our limits.' A real reviewer always spends his first and best pages on the parts of a subject on which he wishes to write, the easy comfortable parts which he knows. The formidable difficulties

which he acknowledges, you foresee by a strange fatality that he will only reach two pages before the end; to his great grief there is no opportunity for discussing them. As a young gentleman, at the India House examination, wrote 'Time up' on nine unfinished papers in succession, so you may occasionally read a whole review, in every article of which the principal difficulty of each successive question is about to be reached at the conclusion. Nor can any one deny that this is the suitable skill, the judicious custom, of the craft.

Some may be inclined to mourn over the old days of systematic arguments and regular discussion. A 'field-day' controversy is a fine thing. These skirmishes have much danger and no glory. Yet there is one immense advantage. The appeal now is to the mass of sensible persons. Professed students are not generally suspected of common sense; and though they often show acuteness in their peculiar pursuits, they have not the various experience, the changing imagination, the feeling nature, the realized detail which are necessary *data* for a thousand questions. Whatever we may think on this point, however, the transition has been made. The Edinburgh Review was, at its beginning, a material step in the change. Unquestionably, the Spectator and Tatler, and such-like writings, had opened a similar vein, but their size was too small. They could only deal with small fragments, or the extreme essence of a subject. They could not give a view of what was complicated, or analyse what was involved. The modern man must be told what to think—shortly no doubt—but he *must* be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes. The Edinburgh Review, which began the system, may be said to be, in this country, the commencement on large topics of suitable views for sensible persons.

The circumstances of the time were especially favourable to such an undertaking. Those years were the commencement of what is called the Eldonine period. The cold and haughty Pitt had gone down to the grave in circumstances singularly contrasting with his prosperous youth, and he had carried along with him the inner essence of half-liberal principle, which had clung to a tenacious mind from youthful associations, and was all that remained to the Tories of abstraction or theory. As for Lord Eldon, it is the most difficult thing in the world to believe that there ever was such a man. It only shows how

intense historical evidence is, that no one really doubts it. He believed in everything which it is impossible to believe in—in the danger of Parliamentary Reform, the danger of Catholic Emancipation, the danger of altering the Court of Chancery, the danger of altering the Courts of Law, the danger of abolishing capital punishment for trivial thefts, the danger of making landowners pay their debts, the danger of making anything more, the danger of making anything less. It seems as if he maturely thought, 'Now I know the present state of things to be consistent with the existence of John Lord Eldon; but if we begin altering that state, I am sure I do not know that it will be consistent.' As Sir Robert Walpole was against all committees of inquiry on the simple ground, 'If they once begin that sort of thing, who knows who will be safe?'—so that great Chancellor (still remembered in his own scene) looked pleasantly down from the woolsack, and seemed to observe, 'Well, it *is* a queer thing that I should be here, and here I mean to stay.' With this idea he employed, for many years, all the abstract intellect of an accomplished lawyer, all the practical *bonhomie* of an accomplished courtier, all the energy of both professions, all the subtlety acquired in either, in the task of maintaining John Lord Eldon in the cabinet, and maintaining a cabinet that would suit John Lord Eldon. No matter what change or misfortunes happened to the Royal house,—whether the most important person in court politics was the old King or the young King, Queen Charlotte or Queen Caroline—whether it was a question of talking grave business to the mutton of George the Third, or queer stories beside the champagne of George the Fourth, there was the same figure. To the first he was tearfully conscientious, and at the second the old northern circuit stories (how old, what outlasting tradition shall ever say?) told with a cheerful *bonhomie*, and a strong conviction that they *were* ludicrous, really seemed to have pleased as well as the more artificial niceties of the professed wits. He was always agreeable, and always serviceable. No little peccadillo offended him: the ideal, according to the satirist, of a 'good-natured man,' he cared for nothing until he was himself hurt. He ever remembered the statute which absolves obedience to a king *de facto*. And it was the same in the political world. There was one man who never changed. No matter what politicians came and went—and a good many,

including several that are now scarcely remembered, did come and go,—the 'Cabinet-maker,' as men called him, still remained. 'As to Lord Liverpool being Prime Minister,' continued Mr. Brougham, 'he is no more Prime Minister than I am. I reckon Lord Liverpool a sort of member of opposition; and after what has recently passed, if I were required, I should designate him as "a noble lord with whom I have the honour to act." Lord Liverpool may have collateral influence, but Lord Eldon has all the direct influence of the Prime Minister. He is Prime Minister to all intents and purposes, and he stands alone in the full exercise of all the influence of that high situation. Lord Liverpool has carried measures against the Lord Chancellor; so have I. If Lord Liverpool carried the Marriage Act, I carried the Education Bill,' &c. &c. And though the general views of Lord Eldon may be described,—though one can say at least negatively and intelligibly that he objected to everything proposed, and never proposed anything himself,—the arguments are such as it would require great intellectual courage to endeavour at all to explain. What follows is a favourable specimen. 'Lord Grey,' says his biographer, 'having introduced a bill for dispensing with the declarations prescribed by the Acts of 25 and 30 Car. II., against the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the Invocation of Saints moved the second reading of it on the 10th of June, when the Lord Chancellor again opposed the principle of such a measure, urging that the law which had been introduced under Charles II. had been re-enacted in the first Parliament of *William III.*, the founder of our civil and religious liberties. It had been thought necessary for the preservation of these, that *papists* should not be allowed to sit in Parliament, and some test was necessary by which it might be ascertained whether a man was a Catholic or a Protestant. The only possible test for such a purpose was an oath declaratory of religious belief, and, as *Dr. Paley* had observed, it was perfectly just to have a religious test of a political creed. He entreated the House not to commit the crime against posterity of transmitting to them in an impaired and insecure state the civil and religious liberties of England.' And this sort of appeal to Paley and King William is made the ground—one can hardly say the reason—for the most rigid adherence to all that was established.

It may be asked, how came the English people to endure

this? They are not naturally illiberal; on the contrary, though slow and cautious, they are prone to steady improvement, and not at all disposed to acquiesce in the unlimited perfection of their rulers. On a certain imaginative side, unquestionably, there is, or was a strong feeling of loyalty, of attachment to what is old, love for what is ancestral, belief in what has been tried. But the fond attachment to the past is a very different idea from a slavish adoration of the present. Nothing is more removed from the Eldonine idolatry of the *status quo* than the old cavalier feeling of deep idolatry for the ancient realm—that half-mystic idea that consecrated what it touched; the moonlight, as it were, which

> 'Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,
> And many an oak that grew thereby.'

Why, then, did the English endure the everlasting Chancellor?

The fact is, that Lord Eldon's rule was maintained a great deal on the same motives as that of Louis Napoleon. One can fancy his astonishment at hearing it said, and his cheerful rejoinder, 'That whatever he was, and Mr. Brougham was in the habit of calling him strange names, no one should ever make him believe that he was a *Bonaparte*.' But, in fact, he was, like the present Emperor, the head of what we call the party of order. Everybody knows what keeps Louis Napoleon in his place. It is not attachment to him, but dread of what he restrains—dread of revolution. The present may not be good, and having such newspapers,—you might say no newspapers,—is dreadful; but it is better than no trade, bankrupt banks, loss of old savings; your mother beheaded on destructive principles; your eldest son shot on conservative ones. Very similar was the feeling of Englishmen in the year 1800. They had no liking at all for the French system. Statesmen saw its absurdity, holy men were shocked at its impiety, mercantile men saw its effect on the 5 per cents. Everybody was revolted by its cruelty. That it came across the Channel was no great recommendation. A witty writer of our own time says, that if a still Mussulman, in his flowing robes, wished to give his son a warning against renouncing his faith, he would take the completest, smartest, dapperest French dandy out of the streets of Pera, and say, 'There, my son, if ever you come

to forget God and the Prophet, you may come to look like *that*.' Exactly similar in old conservative speeches is the use of the French Revolution. If you proposed to alter anything, of importance or not of importance, legal or social, religious or not religious, the same answer was ready. 'You see what the French have come to. They made alterations; if we make alterations, who knows but we may end in the same way?' It was not any peculiar bigotry in Lord Eldon that actuated him, or he would have been powerless; still less was it any affected feeling which he put forward (though, doubtless, he was aware of its persuasive potency, and worked on it most skilfully to his own ends); it was genuine, hearty, craven fear; and he ruled naturally the commonplace Englishman, because he sympathised in his sentiments, and excelled him in his powers.

There was, too, another cause beside fear which then inclined, and which in similar times of miscellaneous revolution will ever incline, subtle rather than creative intellects to a narrow conservatism. Such intellects require an exact creed; they want to be able clearly to distinguish themselves from those around them, to tell to each man where they differ and why they differ; they cannot make assumpt ons; they cannot, like the merely practical man, be content with rough and obvious axioms; they require a *theory*. Such a want it is difficult to satisfy in an age of confusion and tumult, when old habits are shaken, old views overthrown, ancient assumptions rudely questioned, ancient inferences utterly denied, when each man has a different view from his neighbour, when an intellectual change has set father and son at variance, when a man's own household are the special foes of his favourite and self-adopted creed. A bold and original mind breaks through these vexations, and forms for itself a theory satisfactory to its notions, and sufficient for its wants. A weak mind yields a passive obedience to those among whom it is thrown. But a mind which is searching without being creative, which is accurate and logical enough to see defects, without being combinative or inventive enough to provide remedies,—which, in the old language, is discriminative rather than discursive,—is wholly unable, out of the medley of new suggestions, to provide itself with an adequate belief; and it naturally falls back on the *status quo*. This is, at least, clear and simple and defined; you know at any rate what you propose—

where you end—why you pause;—an argumentative defence it is, doubtless, difficult to find; but there are arguments on all sides; the world is a medley of arguments; no one is agreed in which direction to alter the world: what is proposed is as liable to objection as what exists; nonsense for nonsense, the old should keep its ground: and so in times of convulsion, the philosophic scepticism—the ever-questioning hesitation of Hume and Montaigne—the subtlest quintessence of the most restless and refining abstraction—becomes allied to the stupidest, crudest acquiescence in the present and concrete world. We read occasionally in conservative literature (the remark is as true of religion as of politics) alternations of sentences, the first an appeal to the coarsest prejudice,—the next a subtle hint to a craving and insatiable scepticism. You may trace this even in Vesey junior. Lord Eldon never read Hume or Montaigne, but sometimes, in the interstices of cumbrous law, you may find sentences with their meaning, if not in their manner; 'Dumpor's case always struck me as extraordinary; but if you depart from Dumpor's case, what is there to prevent a departure in every direction?'

The glory of the Edinburgh Review is that from the first it steadily set itself to oppose this timorous acquiescence in the actual system. On domestic subjects the history of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century is a species of duel between the Edinburgh Review and Lord Eldon. All the ancient abuses which he thought it most dangerous to impair, they thought it most dangerous to retain. 'To appreciate the value of the Edinburgh Review,' says one of the founders, 'the state of England at the period when that journal began should be had in remembrance. The Catholics were not emancipated. The Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed. The game-laws were horribly oppressive; steel traps and spring-guns were set all over the country; prisoners tried for their lives could have no counsel. Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily on mankind. Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments. The principles of political economy were little understood. The laws of debt and conspiracy were on the worst footing. The enormous wickedness of the slave-trade was tolerated. A thousand evils were in existence which the talents of good and noble men have since lessened or removed: and these efforts have been not a little

assisted by the honest boldness of the Edinburgh Review.' And even more characteristic than the advocacy of these or any other partial or particular reforms is the systematic opposition of the Edinburgh Review to the crude acquiescence in the *status quo*; the timorous dislike to change because it was change; to the optimistic conclusion, 'that what is, ought to be;' the sceptical query, 'How do you know that what you say will be any better?'

In this defence of the principle of innovation, a defence which it requires great imagination (or, as we suggested, the looking across the Channel) to conceive the efficacy of now, the Edinburgh Review was but the doctrinal organ of the Whigs. A great deal of philosophy has been expended in endeavouring to fix and express theoretically the creed of that party; various forms of abstract doctrine have been drawn out, in which elaborate sentence follows hard on elaborate sentence, to be set aside, or at least vigorously questioned by the next or succeeding inquirers. In truth Whiggism is not a creed, it is a character. Perhaps as long as there has been a political history in this country there have been certain men of a cool, moderate, resolute firmness, not gifted with high imagination, little prone to enthusiastic sentiment, heedless of large theories and speculations, careless of dreamy scepticism; with a clear view of the next step, and a wise intention to take it; a strong conviction that the elements of knowledge are true, and a steady belief that the present world can, and should be, quietly improved.

These are the Whigs. A tinge of simplicity still clings to the character; of old it was the Country Party. The limitation of their imagination is in some sort an advantage to such men; it confines them to a simple path, prevents their being drawn aside by various speculations, restricts them to what is clear and intelligible, and at hand. 'I cannot,' said Sir S. Romilly, 'be convinced without arguments, and I do not see that either Burke or Paine advance any.' He was unable to see that the most convincing arguments,—and some of those in the work of Burke, which he alludes to, are certainly sound enough,—may be expressed imaginatively, and may work a far firmer persuasion than any neat and abstract statement. Nor are the intellectual powers of the characteristic element in this party exactly of the loftiest order; they have no call to

make great discoveries, or pursue unbounded designs, or amaze the world by some wild dream of empire and renown. That terrible essence of daring genius, such as we see it in Napoleon, and can imagine it in some of the conquerors of old time, is utterly removed from their cool and placid judgment. In taste they are correct,—that is, better appreciating the complete compliance with explicit and ascertained rules, than the unconscious exuberance of inexplicable and unforeseen beauties. In their own writings, they display the defined neatness of the second order, rather than the aspiring hardihood of the first excellence. In action they are quiet and reasonable rather than inventive and overwhelming. Their power indeed is scarcely intellectual; on the contrary, it resides in what Aristotle would have called their ἦθος, and we should call their nature. They are emphatically pure-natured and firm-natured. Instinctively casting aside the coarse temptations and crude excitements of a vulgar earth, they pass like a September breeze across the other air, cool, and refreshing, unable, one might fancy, even to comprehend the many offences with which all else is fainting and oppressed. So far even as their excellence is intellectual, it consists less in the supereminent possession of any single talent or endowment, than in the simultaneous enjoyment and felicitous adjustment of many or several;—in a certain balance of the faculties which we call judgment or sense, which placidly indicate to them what should be done, and which is not preserved without an equable calm, and a patient, persistent watchfulness. In such men the moral and intellectual nature half become one. Whether, according to the Greek question, manly virtue can be taught or not, assuredly it has never been taught to them; it seems a native endowment; it seems a soul—a soul of honour—as we speak, within the exterior soul; a fine impalpable essence, more exquisite than the rest of the being; as the thin pillar of the cloud, more beautiful than the other blue of heaven, governing and guiding a simple way through the dark wilderness of our world.

To descend from such elevations, among *people* Sir Samuel Romilly is the best-known type of this character. The admirable biography of him made public his admirable virtues. Yet it is probable that among the aristocratic Whigs, persons as typical of the character can be found. This species of noble

nature is exactly of the kind which hereditary associations tend to purify and confirm; just that casual, delicate, placid virtue which it is so hard to find, perhaps so sanguine to expect, in a rough tribune of the people. Defects enough there are in this character, on which we shall say something; yet it is wonderful to see what an influence in this sublunary sphere it gains and preserves. The world makes an oracle of its judgment. There is a curious living instance of this. You may observe that when an ancient liberal, Lord John, or any of the essential sect, has done anything very queer, the last thing you would imagine anybody would dream of doing, and is attacked for it, he always answers boldly, 'Lord Lansdowne said I *might*;' or if it is a ponderous day, the eloquence runs, 'A noble friend with whom I have ever had the inestimable advantage of being associated from the commencement (the infantile period, I might say) of my political life, and to whose advice,' &c. &c. &c.—and a very cheerful existence it must be for 'my noble friend' to be expected to justify—(for they never say it except they have done something very odd)—and dignify every aberration. Still it must be a beautiful feeling to have a man like Lord John, to have a stiff, small man bowing down before you. And a good judge certainly suggested the conferring of this authority. 'Why do they not talk over the virtues and excellences of Lansdowne? There is no man who performs the duties of life better, or fills a high station in a more becoming manner. He is full of knowledge, and eager for its acquisition. His remarkable politeness is the result of goodnature, regulated by good sense. He looks for talents and qualities among all ranks of men, and adds them to his stock of society, as a botanist does his plants; and while other aristocrats are yawning among stars and garters, Lansdowne is refreshing his soul with the fancy and genius which he has found in odd places, and gathered to the marbles and pictures of his palace. Then he is an honest politician, a wise statesman, and has a philosophic mind,' &c. &c.* Here is devotion for a carping critic; and who ever heard before of *bonhomie* in an idol?

It may strike some that this equable kind of character is not the most interesting. Many will prefer the bold felicities of daring genius, the deep plans of latent and searching sagacity, the hardy triumphs of an overawing and imperious will. Yet

*Sydney Smith, Memoirs, vol. i. p. 489.

it is not unremarkable that an experienced and erudite Frenchman, not unalive to artistic effect, has just now selected this very species of character for the main figure in a large portion of an elaborate work. The hero of M. Villemain is one to whom he delights to ascribe such things as *bon sens, esprit juste, cœur excellent.* The result, it may be owned, is a little dull, yet it is not the less characteristic. The instructed observer has detected the deficiency of his country. If France had more men of firm will, quiet composure, with a suspicion of enormous principle and a taste for moderate improvement: if a Whig party, in a word, were possible in France, France would be free. And though there are doubtless crises in affairs, dark and terrible moments, when a more creative intellect is needful to propose, a more dictatorial will is necessary to carry out, a sudden and daring resolution; though in times of inextricable confusion—perhaps the present is one of them*—a more abstruse and disentangling intellect is required to untwist the ravelled perplexities of a complicated world; yet England will cease to be the England of our fathers, when a large share in great affairs is no longer given to the equable sense, the composed resolution, the homely purity of the characteristic Whigs.

It is evident that between such men and Lord Eldon there could be no peace; and between them and the Edinburgh Review there was a natural alliance. Not only the kind of reforms there proposed, the species of views therein maintained, but the very manner in which those views and alterations are put forward and maintained, is just what they would like. The kind of writing suitable to such minds is not the elaborate, ambitious, exhaustive discussion of former ages, but the clear, simple, occasional writing (as we just now described it) of the present times. The opinions to be expressed are short and simple; the innovations suggested are natural and evident; neither one nor the other require more than an intelligible statement, a distinct exposition to the world; and their reception would be only impeded and complicated by operose and cumbrous argumentation. The exact mind which of all others dislikes the stupid adherence to the *status quo,* is the keen, quiet, improving Whig mind; the exact kind of writing most adapted to express that dislike is the cool, pungent, didactic essay.

*This was published in October, 1855.

Equally common to the Whigs and the Edinburgh Review is the enmity to the sceptical, over-refining Toryism of Hume and Montaigne. The Whigs, it is true, have a conservatism of their own, but it instinctively clings to certain practical rules tried by steady adherence, to appropriate formulæ verified by the regular application and steady success of many ages. Political philosophers speak of it as a great step when the idea of an attachment to an organised code and system of rules and laws takes the place of the exclusive oriental attachment to the person of the single monarch. This step is natural, is instinctive to the Whig mind; that cool impassive intelligence is little likely to yield to ardent emotions of personal loyalty; but its chosen ideal is a body or collection of wise rules fitly applicable to great affairs, pleasing a placid sense by an evident propriety, gratifying the capacity for business by a constant and clear applicability. The Whigs are constitutional by instinct, as the Cavaliers were monarchical by devotion. It has been a jest at their present leader that he is over familiar with public forms and parliamentary rites. The first wish of the Whigs is to retain the constitution; the second—and it is of almost equal strength—is to improve it. They think the body of laws now existing to be, in the main and in its essence, excellent; but yet that there are exceptional defects which should be remedied, superficial inconsistencies that should be corrected. The most opposite creed is that of the sceptic, who teaches that you are to keep what is because it exists; not from a conviction of its excellence, but from an uncertainty that anything better can be obtained. The one is an attachment to precise rules for specific reasons; the other an acquiescence in the present on grounds that would be equally applicable to its very opposite, from a disbelief in the possibility of improvement, and a conviction of the uncertainty of all things. And equally adverse to an unlimited scepticism is the nature of popular writing. It is true that the greatest teachers of that creed have sometimes, and as it were of set purpose, adopted that species of writing; yet essentially it is inimical to them. Its appeal is to the people; as has been shown, it addresses the *élite* of common men, sensible in their affairs, intelligent in their tastes, influential among their neighbours. What is absolute scepticism to such men?—a dream, a chimera, an inexplicable absurdity. Tell it to them to-day, and they will

have forgotten it to-morrow. A man of business hates elaborate trifling. 'If you do not believe *your own* senses,' he will say, 'there is no use in *my* talking to you.' As to the multiplicity of arguments and the complexity of questions, he feels them little. He has a plain, simple, as he would say, practical way of looking at the matter; and you will never make him comprehend any other. He knows the world *can* be improved. And thus what we may call the middle species of writing—which is intermediate between the light, frivolous style of merely amusing literature, and the heavy, conscientious elaborateness of methodical philosophy—the style of the original Edinburgh—is, in truth, as opposed to the vague, desponding conservatism of the sceptic, as it is to the stupid conservatism of the crude and uninstructed; and substantially for the same reason—that it is addressed to men of cool, clear, and practical understandings.

It is, indeed, no wonder that the Edinburgh Review should be agreeable to the Whigs, for the people who founded it were Whigs. Among these, three stand pre-eminent—Horner, Jeffrey, and Sydney Smith. Other men of equal ability may have contributed—and a few did contribute—to its pages; but these men were, more than any one else, the first Edinburgh Review.

Francis Horner's was a short and singular life. He was the son of an Edinburgh shopkeeper. He died at thirty-nine; and when he died, from all sides of the usually cold House of Commons great statesmen and thorough gentlemen got up to deplore his loss. Tears are rarely parliamentary: all men are arid towards young Scotchmen; yet it was one of that inclement nation whom statesmen of the species Castlereagh, and statesmen of the species Whitbread—with all the many kinds and species that lie between the two—rose in succession to lament. The fortunes and superficial aspect of the man make it more singular. He had no wealth, was a briefless barrister, never held an office, was a conspicuous member of the most unpopular of all oppositions—the opposition to a glorious and successful war. He never had the means of obliging any one. He was destitute of showy abilities: he had not the intense eloquence or overwhelming ardour which enthral and captivate popular assemblies: his powers of administration were little tried, and may possibly be slightly

questioned. In his youthful reading he was remarkable for laying down, for a few months of study, enormous plans, such as many years would scarcely complete; and not especially remarkable for doing anything wonderful towards accomplishing those plans. Sir Walter Scott, who, though not illiberal in his essential intellect, was a keen partisan on superficial matters, and no lenient critic on actual Edinburgh Whigs, used to observe, 'I cannot admire your Horner; he always reminds me of Obadiah's bull, who, though he never certainly did produce a calf, nevertheless went about his business with so much gravity, that he commanded the respect of the whole parish.' It is no explanation of the universal regret, that he was a considerable political economist: no real English gentleman, in his secret soul, was ever sorry for the death of a political economist: he is much more likely to be sorry for his life. There is an idea that he has something to do with statistics; or, if that be exploded, that he is a person who writes upon 'value:' says that rent is—you cannot very well make out what; talks excruciating currency; he may be useful as drying machines are useful;* but the notion of crying about him is absurd. The economical loss might be great, but it will not explain the mourning for Francis Horner.

The fact is that Horner is a striking example of the advantage of keeping an atmosphere. This may sound like nonsense, and yet it is true. There is around some men a kind of circle or halo of influences, and traits, and associations, by which they infallibly leave a distinct and uniform impression on all their contemporaries. It is very difficult, even for those who have the best opportunities, to analyze exactly what this impression consists in, or why it was made—but it *is* made. There is a certain undefinable keeping in the traits and manner, and common speech and characteristic actions of some men, which inevitably stamps the same mark and image. It is like a man's style. There are some writers who can be known by a few words of their writing; each syllable is instinct with a certain spirit: put it into the hands of any one chosen at random, the same impression will be produced by the same

* 'Horner is ill. He was desired to read amusing books: upon searching his library, it appeared he had no amusing books; the nearest approach to a work of that description being the *Indian Trader's Complete Guide*.'—*Sydney Smith's Letter to Lady Holland.*

casual and felicitous means. Just so in character, the air and atmosphere, so to speak, which are around a man, have a delicate and expressive power, and leave a stamp of unity on the interpretative faculty of mankind. Death dissolves this association, and it becomes a problem for posterity what it was that contemporaries observed and reverenced. There is Lord Somers. Does any one know why he had such a reputation? He was Lord Chancellor, and decided a Bank case, and had an influence in the Cabinet; but there have been Lord Chancellors, and Bank cases, and influential Cabinet ministers not a few, that have never attained to a like reputation. There is little we can connect specifically with his name. Lord Macaulay, indeed, says that he spoke for five minutes on the bishops' trial; and that when he sat down, his reputation as an orator and constitutional lawyer was established. But this must be a trifle eloquent; hardly any orator could be fast enough to attain such a reputation in five minutes. The truth is, that Lord Somers had around him that inexpressible attraction and influence of which we speak. He left a sure, and if we may trust the historian, even a momentary impression on those who saw him. By a species of tact they felt him to be a great man. The ethical sense—for there is almost such a thing in simple persons—discriminated the fine and placid oneness of his nature. It was the same on a smaller scale with Horner. After he had left Edinburgh several years, his closest and most confidential associate writes to him:—'There is no circumstance in your life, my dear Horner, so enviable as the universal confidence which your conduct has produced among all descriptions of men. I do not speak of your friends, who have been near and close observers; but I have had some occasions of observing the impression which those who are distant spectators have had, and I believe there are few instances of any person of your age possessing the same character for independence and integrity, qualities for which very little credit is given in general to young men.'* Sydney Smith said, 'The ten commandments were written on his countenance.' Of course he was a very ugly man, but the moral impression in fact conveyed was equally efficacious; 'I have often,' said the same most just observer, 'told him, that there was not a crime he might not commit with impunity, as no judge or jury who saw

* Letter from Lord Murray.

him would give the smallest credit to any evidence against him. There was in his look a calm settled love of all that was honourable and good—an air of wisdom and of sweetness. You saw at once that he was a great man, whom nature had intended for a leader of human beings; you ranged yourself willingly under his banners, and cheerfully submitted to his sway.' From the somewhat lengthened description of what we defined as the essential Whig character, it is evident how agreeable and suitable such a man was to their quiet, composed, and aristocratic nature. His tone was agreeable to English gentlemen: a firm and placid manliness, without effort or pretension, is what they like best; and therefore it was that the House of Commons grieved for his loss—unanimously and without distinction.

Some friend of Horner's, in his own time, mildly criticized him for a tendency to party spirit. The disease in him, if real, was by no means virulent; but it is worth noticing as one of the defects to which the proper Whig character is specially prone. It is evident in the quiet agreement of the men. Their composed, unimaginative nature is inclined to isolate itself in a single view; their placid disposition, never prone to self-distrust, is rather susceptible of friendly influence; their practical habit is concentrated on what should be done. They do not wish—they do not like to go forth into various speculation; to put themselves in the position of opponents; to weigh in a refining scale the special weight of small objections. Their fancy is hardly vivid enough to explain to them all the characters of those whom they oppose; their intellect scarcely detective enough to discover a meaning for each grain in opposing arguments. Nor is their temper, it may be, always prone to be patient with propositions which tease, and persons who resist them. The wish to call down fire from heaven is rarely absent in pure zeal for a pure cause.

A good deal of praise has naturally been bestowed upon the Whigs for adopting such a man as Horner, with Romilly and others of that time; and much excellent eulogy has been expended on the close boroughs, which afforded to the Whig leaders a useful mode of showing their favour. Certainly the character of Horner was one altogether calculated to ingratiate itself with the best and most special Whig nature. But as for the eulogy on the proprietary seats in Parliament, it is certian

that from the position of the Whig party, the nomination system was then most likely to show its excellences, and to conceal its defects. Nobody but an honest man would bind himself thoroughly to the Whigs. It was evident that the reign of Lord Eldon must be long; the heavy and common Englishman (after all, the most steady and powerful force in our political constitution) had been told that Lord Grey was in favour of the 'Papists,' and liked Bonaparte; and the consequence was a long, painful, arduous exile on 'the other side of the table,'—the last place any political adventurer would wish to arrive at. Those who have no bribes will never charm the corrupt; those who have nothing to give will not please those who desire that much shall be given them. There is an observation of Niel Blane, the innkeeper, in 'Old Mortality.' '"And what are we to eat ourselves, then, father," asked Jenny, "when we hae sent awa the haile meal in the ark and the girnel?" "We maun gaur wheat flour serve us for a blink," said Niel, with an air of resignation. "It is not that ill food, though far frae being sae hearty and kindly to a Scotchman's stomach as the curney aitmeal is: the Englishers live amaist upon it,"' &c. It was so with the Whigs; they were obliged to put up with honest and virtuous men, and they wanted able men to carry on a keen opposition; and after all, they and the 'Englishers' like such men best.

In another point of view, too, Horner's life was characteristic of those times. It might seem, at first sight, odd that the English Whigs should go to Scotland to find a literary representative. There was no place where Toryism was so intense. The constitution of Scotland at that time has been described as the worst constitution in Europe. The nature of the representation made the entire country a government borough. In the towns, the franchise belonged to a close and self-electing corporation, who were always carefully watched: the country representation, anciently resting on a property qualification, had become vested in a few titular freeholders, something like lords of the manor, only that they might have no manor; and these, even with the addition of the borough freeholders, did not amount to three thousand. The whole were in the hands of Lord Eldon's party, and the entire force, influence, and patronage of Government were spent to maintain and keep it so. By inevitable consequence, Liberalism, even of the most

moderate kind, was thought almost a criminal offence. The mild Horner was considered a man of ' very violent opinions.' Jeffrey's father, a careful and discerning parent, was so anxious to shield him from the intellectual taint, as to forbid his attendance at Stewart's lectures. This seems an odd place to find the eruption of a liberal review. Of course the necessary effect of a close and common-place tyranny was to engender a strong reaction in searching and vigorous minds. The Liberals of the north, though far fewer, may perhaps have been stronger Liberals than those of the south; but this will hardly explain the phenomenon. The reason is an academical one; the teaching of Scotland seems to have been designed to teach men to write essays and articles. There are two kinds of education, into all the details of which it is not now pleasant to go, but which may be adequately described as the education of facts, and the education of speculation. The system of facts is the English system. The strength of the pedagogue and the agony of the pupil are designed to engender a good knowledge of two languages; in the old times, a little arithmetic; now also a knowledge, more or less, of mathematics and mathematical physics. The positive tastes and tendencies of the English mind confine its training to ascertained learning and definite science. In Scotland the case has long been different. The time of a man like Horner was taken up with speculations like these: ' I have long been feeding my ambition with the prospect of accomplishing, at some future period of my life, a work similar to that which Sir Francis Bacon executed about two hundred years ago. It will depend on the sweep and turn of my speculations, whether they shall be thrown into the form of a discursive commentary on the " Instauratio Magna " of that great author, or shall be entitled to an original form, under the title of a " View of the Limits of Human Knowledge and a System of the Principles of Philosophical Inquiry." I shall say nothing at present of the audacity,' &c. &c. And this sort of planning, which is the staple of his youthful biography, was really accompanied by much application to metaphysics, history, political economy, and such like studies. It is not at all to our present purpose to compare this speculative and indeterminate kind of study with the rigorous accurate education of England. The fault of the former is sometimes to produce a sort of lecturer *in vacuo,* ignorant of exact pursuits, and diffusive of

vague words. The English now and then produce a learned creature like a thistle, prickly with all facts, and incapable of all fruit. But passing by this general question, it cannot be doubted that, as a preparation for the writing of various articles, the system of Edinburgh is enormously superior to that of Cambridge. The particular, compact, exclusive learning of England is inferior in this respect to the general, diversified, omnipresent information of the north; and what is more, the speculative, dubious nature of metaphysical and such like pursuits tends, in a really strong mind, to cultivate habits of independent thought and original discussion. A bold mind so trained will even *wish* to advance its peculiar ideas, on its own account, in a written and special form; that is, as we said, to write an article. Such are the excellences in this respect of the system of which Horner is an example. The defects tend the same way. It tends, as is said, to make a man fancy he knows everything. 'Well, then, at least,' it may be answered, 'I can write an article on everything.'

The facility and boldness of the habits so produced were curiously exemplified in Lord Jeffrey. During the first six years of the Edinburgh Review he wrote as many as seventy-nine articles; in a like period afterwards he wrote forty. Any one who should expect to find a pure perfection in these miscellaneous productions, should remember their bulk. If all his reviews were reprinted, they would be very many. And all the while he was a busy lawyer, was editor of the Review, did the business, corrected the proof sheets; and, more than all, what one would have thought a very strong man's work, actually managed Henry Brougham. You must not criticise papers like these, rapidly written in the hurry of life, as you would the painful words of an elaborate sage, slowly and with anxious awfulness instructing mankind. Some things, a few things, are for eternity; some, and a good many, are for time. We do not expect the everlastingness of the Pyramids from the vibratory grandeur of a Tyburnian mansion.

The truth is, that Lord Jeffrey was something of a Whig critic. We have hinted, that among the peculiarities of that character, an excessive partiality for new, arduous, overwhelming, original excellence, was by no means to be numbered. Their tendency inclining to the quiet footsteps of custom, they like to trace the exact fulfilment of admitted rules, a just

accordance with the familiar features of ancient merit. But they are most averse to mysticism. A clear, precise, discriminating intellect shrinks at once from the symbolic, the unbounded, the indefinite. The misfortune is that mysticism is true. There certainly are kinds of truth, borne in as it were instinctively on the human intellect, most influential on the character and the heart, yet hardly capable of stringent statement, difficult to limit by an elaborate definition. Their course is shadowy; the mind seems rather to have seen than to see them, more to feel after than definitely apprehend them. They commonly involve an infinite element, which of course cannot be stated precisely, or else a first principle—an original tendency—of our intellectual constitution, which it is impossible not to feel, and yet which it is hard to extricate in terms and words. Of this latter kind is what has been called the religion of nature, or more exactly, perhaps, the religion of the imagination. This is an interpretation of the world. According to it the beauty of the universe has a meaning, its grandeur a soul, its sublimity an expression. As we gaze on the faces of those whom we love; as we watch the light of life in the dawning of their eyes, and the play of their features, and the wildness of their animation; as we trace in changing lineaments a varying sign; as a charm and a thrill seem to run along the tone of a voice, to haunt the mind with a mere word; as a tone seems to roam in the ear; as a trembling fancy hears words that are unspoken; so in nature the mystical sense finds a motion in the mountain, and a power in the waves, and a meaning in the long white line of the shore, and a thought in the blue of heaven, and a gushing soul in the buoyant light, an unbounded being in the vast void air, and

'Wakeful watchings in the pointed stars.'

There is a philosophy in this which might be explained, if explaining were to our purpose. It might be advanced that there are original sources of expression in the essential grandeur and sublimity of nature, of an analogous though fainter kind, to those familiar, inexplicable signs by which we trace in the very face and outward lineaments of man the existence and working of the mind within. But be this as it may, it is certain that Mr. Wordsworth preached this kind of religion, and that Lord Jeffrey did not believe a word of it. His cool, sharp,

collected mind revolted from its mysticism; his detective intelligence was absorbed in its apparent fallaciousness; his light humour made sport with the sublimities of the preacher. His love of perspicuity was vexed by its indefiniteness; the precise philosopher was amazed at its mystic unintelligibility. Finding a little fault was doubtless not unpleasant to him. The reviewer's pen—*φόνος ἠηώεσσιν*—has seldom been more poignantly wielded. 'If,' he was told, 'you could be alarmed into the semblance of modesty, you would charm everybody; but remember my joke against you,' (Sydney Smith *loquitur*) 'about the moon. D—n the solar system—bad light—planets too distant—pestered with comets: feeble contrivance; could make a better with great ease.' Yet we do not mean that in this great literary feud, either of the combatants had all the right, or gained all the victory. The world has given judgment. Both Mr. Wordsworth and Lord Jeffrey have received their reward. The one had his own generation: the laughter of men, the applause of drawing-rooms, the concurrence of the crowd; the other a succeeding age, the fond enthusiasm of secret students, the lonely rapture of lonely minds. And each has received according to his kind. If all cultivated men speak differently because of the existence of Wordsworth and Coleridge; if not a thoughtful English book has appeared for forty years, without some trace for good or evil of their influence; if sermon-writers subsist upon their thoughts; if 'sacred poets' thrive by translating their weaker portion into the speech of women; if, when all this is over, some sufficient part of their writing will ever be fitting food for wild musing and solitary meditation, surely this is because they possessed the inner nature—'an intense and glowing mind,' 'the vision and the faculty divine.' But if, perchance, in their weaker moments, the great authors of the 'Lyrical Ballads' did ever imagine that the world was to pause because of their verses: that Peter Bell would be popular in drawing-rooms; that Christabel would be perused in the City; that people of fashion would make a handbook of the Excursion,—it was well for them to be told at once that this was not so. Nature ingeniously prepared a shrill artificial voice, which spoke in season and out of season, enough and more than enough, what will ever be the idea of the cities of the plain concerning those who live alone among the mountains; of the frivolous concerning the grave; of the

gregarious concerning the recluse; of those who laugh concerning those who laugh not; of the common concerning the uncommon; of those who lend on usury concerning those who lend not; the notion of the world of those whom it will not reckon among the righteous—it said,* 'This won't do!' And so in all time will the lovers of polished Liberalism speak, concerning the intense and lonely prophet.

Yet, if Lord Jeffrey had the natural infirmities of a Whig critic, he certainly had also its extrinsic and political advantages. Especially at Edinburgh the Whigs wanted a literary man. The Liberal party in Scotland had long groaned under political exclusion; they had suffered, with acute mortification, the heavy sway of Henry Dundas, but they had been compensated by a literary supremacy; in the book-world they enjoyed a domination. On a sudden this was rudely threatened. The fame of Sir Walter Scott was echoed from the southern world, and appealed to every national sentiment—to the inmost heart of every Scotchman. And what a ruler! a lame Tory, a jocose Jacobite, a laugher at liberalism, a scoffer at metaphysics, an unbeliever in political economy! What a gothic ruler for the modern Athens!—was this man to reign over them? It would not have been like human nature, if a strong and intellectual party had not soon found a clever and noticeable rival. Poets, indeed, are not made 'to order;' but Byron, speaking the sentiment of his time and circle, counted reviewers their equals. If a Tory produced 'Marmion,' a Whig wrote the best article upon it; Scott might, so ran Liberal speech, be the best living writer of fiction; Jeffrey, clearly, was the most shrewd and accomplished of literary critics.

And though this was an absurd delusion, Lord Jeffrey was no every-day man. He invented the trade of editorship. Before him an editor was a bookseller's drudge; he is now a distinguished functionary. If Jeffrey was not a great critic, he had, what very great critics have wanted, the art of writing what most people would think good criticism. He might not know his subject, but he knew his readers. People liked to read ideas which they can imagine to have been their own. 'Why does Scarlett always persuade the jury?' asked a rustic gentleman. 'Because there are twelve Scarletts in the jury-box,'

* The first words of Jeffrey's review of the Excursion are, 'This will never do.'

replied an envious advocate. What Scarlett was in law, Jeffrey was in criticism; he could become that which his readers could not avoid being. He was neither a pathetic writer nor a profound writer; but he was a quick-eyed, bustling, black-haired, sagacious, agreeable man of the world. He had his day, and was entitled to his day; but a gentle oblivion must now cover his already subsiding reputation.

Sydney Smith was an after-dinner writer. His words have a flow, a vigour, an expression, which is not given to hungry mortals. You seem to read of good wine, of good cheer, of beaming and buoyant enjoyment. There is little trace of labour in his composition; it is poured forth like an unceasing torrent, rejoicing daily to run its course. And what courage there is in it! There is as much variety of pluck in writing across a sheet, as in riding across a country. Cautious men have many adverbs, 'usually,' 'nearly,' 'almost:' safe men begin, 'it may be advanced:' you never know precisely what their premises are, nor what their conclusion is; they go tremulously like a timid rider; they turn hither and thither; they do not go straight across a subject, like a masterly mind. A few sentences are enough for a master of sentences. A practical topic wants rough vigour and strong exposition. This is the writing of 'Sydney Smith.' It is suited to the broader kind of important questions. For anything requiring fine nicety of speculation, long elaborateness of deduction, evanescent sharpness of distinction, neither his style nor his mind was fit. He had no patience for long argument, no acuteness for delicate precision, no fangs for recondite research. Writers, like teeth, are divided into incisors and grinders. Sydney Smith was a 'molar.' He did not run a long sharp argument into the interior of a question; he did not, in the common phrase, go deeply into it; but he kept it steadily under the contact of a strong, capable, heavy, jaw-like understanding,—pressing its surface, effacing its intricacies, grinding it down. Yet as we said, this is done without toil. The play of the 'molar' is instinctive and placid; he could not help it; it would seem that he had an enjoyment in it.

The story is, that he liked a bright light; that when he was a poor parson in the country, he used, not being able to afford more delicate luminaries, to adorn his drawing-room with a hundred little lamps of tin metal and mutton fat. When

you know this, you see it in all his writings. There is the same preference of perspicuity throughout them. Elegance, fine savour, sweet illustration, are quite secondary. His only question to an argument was, 'will it tell?' as to an example, 'will it exemplify?' Like what is called 'push' in a practical man, his style goes straight to its object; it is not restrained by the gentle hindrances, the delicate decorums of refining natures. There is nothing more characteristic of the Scandinavian mythology, than that it had a god with a hammer. You have no better illustration of our English humour, than the great success of this huge and healthy organisation.

There is something about this not exactly to the Whig taste. They do not like such broad fun, and rather dislike unlimited statement. Lord Melbourne, it is plain, declined to make him a bishop. In this there might be a vestige of Canningite prejudice, but on the whole, there was the distinction between the two men which there is between the loud wit and the *recherché* thinker—between the bold controversialist and the discriminative statesman. A refined *noblesse* can hardly respect a humorist; he amuses them, and they like him, but they are puzzled to know whether he does not laugh at them as well as with them; and the notion of being laughed at, ever, or on any score, is alien to their shy decorum and suppressed pride. But in a broader point of view, and taking a wider range of general character, there was a good deal in common. More than any one else, Sydney Smith was Liberalism in life. Somebody has defined Liberalism as the spirit of the world. It represents its genial enjoyment, its wise sense, its steady judgment, its preference of the near to the far, of the seen to the unseen; it represents, too, its shrinking from difficult dogma, from stern statement, from imperious superstition. What health is to the animal, Liberalism is to the polity. It is a principle of fermenting enjoyment, running over all the nerves, inspiring the frame, happy in its mind, easy in its place, glad to behold the sun. All this Sydney Smith, as it were, personified. The biography just published of him will be very serviceable to his fame. He has been regarded too much as a fashionable jester, and metropolitan wit of society. We have now for the first time a description of him as he was,—equally at home in the crude world of Yorkshire, and amid the quintessential refinements of Mayfair. It is impossible to

believe that he did not give the epithet to his parish: it is now called Foston *le Clay*. It was a ' mute inglorious ' Sydney of the district, that invented the name, if it is really older than the century. The place has an obtuse soil, inhabited by stiff-clayed Yorkshiremen. There was nobody in the parish to speak to, only peasants, farmers, and such like (what the clergy call ' parishioners ') and an old clerk who thought every one who came from London a fool, ' but you I do zee, Mr. Smith, be no fool.' This was the sort of life.

' I turned schoolmaster, to educate my son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs. Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer, as I could not let my land. A man-servant was too expensive; so I caught up a little garden-girl, made like a milestone, christened her Bunch, put a napkin in her hand, and made her my butler. The girls taught her to read, Mrs. Sydney to wait, and I undertook her morals. Bunch became the best butler in the county.

' I had little furniture, so I bought a cart-load of deals; took a carpenter (who came to me for parish relief, called Jack Robinson) with a face like a full-moon, into my service; established him in a barn, and said, "Jack, furnish my house." You see the result!

'At last it was suggested that a carriage was much wanted in the establishment; after diligent search, I discovered in the back settlements of a York coach-maker an ancient green chariot, supposed to have been the earliest invention of the kind. I brought it home in triumph to my admiring family. Being somewhat dilapidated, the village tailor lined it, the village blacksmith repaired it; nay, (but for Mrs. Sydney's earnest entreaties,) we believe the village painter would have exercised his genius upon the exterior; it escaped this danger however, and the result was wonderful. Each year added to its charms: it grew younger and younger; a new wheel, a new spring; I christened it the *Immortal;* it was known all over the neighbourhood; the village boys cheered it, and the village dogs barked at it; but " Faber meæ fortunæ " was my motto, and we had no false shame.

' Added to all these domestic cares, I was village parson,

village doctor, village comforter, village magistrate, and Edinburgh Reviewer; so you see I had not much time left on my hands to regret London.'

It is impossible that this should not at once remind us of the life of Sir Walter Scott. There is the same strong sense, the same glowing, natural pleasure, the same power of dealing with men, the same power of diffusing common happiness. Both enjoyed as much in a day, as an ordinary man in a month. The term 'animal spirits' peculiarly expresses this bold enjoyment; it seems to come from a principle intermediate between the mind and the body; to be hardly intellectual enough for the soul, and yet too permeating and aspiring for crude matter. Of course there is an immense imaginative world in Scott's existence to which Sydney Smith had no claim. But they met upon the present world; they enjoyed the spirit of life; 'they loved the world, and the world them;' they did not pain themselves with immaterial speculation—roast beef was an admitted fact. A certain, even excessive practical caution which is ascribed to the Englishman, Scott would have been the better for. Yet his biography would have been the worse. There is nothing in the life before us comparable in interest to the tragic, gradual cracking of the great mind; the overtasking of the great capital, and the ensuing failure; the spectacle of heaving genius breaking in the contact with misfortune. The anticipation of this pain increases the pleasure of the reader; the commencing threads of coming calamity shade the woof of pleasure; the proximity of suffering softens the ὕβρις, the terrible, fatiguing energy of enjoyment.

A great deal of excellent research has been spent on the difference between 'humour' and 'wit,' into which metaphysical problem 'our limits' of course, forbid us to enter. There is, however, between them, the distinction of dry sticks and green sticks; there is in humour a living energy, a diffused potency, a noble sap; it grows upon the character of the humorist. Wit is part of the machinery of the intellect; as Madame de Staël says, '*La gaieté de l'esprit est facile à tous les hommes d'esprit.*' We wonder Mr. Babbage does not invent a punning-engine; it is just as possible as a calculating one. Sydney Smith's mirth was essentially humorous; it clings to the

character of the man; as with the sayings of Dr. Johnson, there is a species of personality attaching to it; the word is more graphic because Sydney Smith—that man being the man that he was—said it, than it would have been if said by any one else. In a desponding moment, he would have he was none the better for the jests which he made, any more than a bottle for the wine which passed through it: this is a true description of many a wit, but he was very unjust in attributing it to himself.

Sydney Smith is often compared to Swift; but this only shows with how little thought our common criticism is written. The two men have really nothing in common, except that they were both high in the church, and both wrote amusing letters about Ireland. Of course, to the great constructive and elaborative power displayed in Swift's longer works, Sydney Smith has no pretension; he could not have written 'Gulliver's Travels;' but so far as the two series of Irish letters goes, it seems plain that he has the advantage. Plymley's letters are true; the treatment may be incomplete—the Catholic religion may have latent dangers and insidious attractions which are not there mentioned—but the main principle is sound; the common sense of religious toleration is hardly susceptible of better explanation. Drapier's letters, on the contrary, are essentially absurd; they are a clever appeal to ridiculous prejudices. Who cares now for a disputation on the evils to be apprehended a hundred years ago from adulterated halfpence, especially when we know that the halfpence were not adulterated, and that if they had been, those evils would never have arisen? Any one, too, who wishes to make a collection of currency crotchets, will find those letters worth his attention. No doubt there is a clever affectation of common-sense as in all of Swift's political writings, and the style has an air of business; yet, on the other hand, there are no passages which any one would now care to quote for their manner and their matter; and there are many in 'Plymley' that will be constantly cited, so long as existing controversies are at all remembered. The whole genius of the two writers is emphatically opposed. Sydney Smith's is the ideal of popular, buoyant, riotous fun; it cries and laughs with boisterous mirth; it rolls hither and thither like a mob, with elastic and commonplace joy. Swift was a detective in a dean's wig; he watched the mob; his whole wit is a kind of dexterous

indication of popular frailties; he hated the crowd; he was a spy on beaming smiles, and a common informer against genial enjoyment. His whole essence was a soreness against mortality; show him innocent mirth, he would say, How absurd! He was painfully wretched, no doubt, in himself: perhaps, as they say, he had no heart; but his mind, his brain had a frightful capacity for secret pain; his sharpness was the sharpness of disease; his power the sore acumen of morbid wretchedness. It is impossible to fancy a parallel more proper to show the excellence, the unspeakable superiority of a buoyant and bounding writer.

At the same time, it is impossible to give to Sydney Smith the highest rank, even as a humorist. Almost all his humour has reference to the incongruity of special means to special ends. The notion of Plymley is want of conformity between the notions of 'my brother Abraham,' and the means of which he makes use; of the quiet clergyman, who was always told he was a bit of a goose, advocating conversion by muskets, and stopping Bonaparte by Peruvian bark. The notion of the letters to Archdeacon Singleton is, a bench of bishops, placidly and pleasantly destroying the church. It is the same with most of his writings. Even when there is nothing absolutely practical in the idea, the subject is from the scenery of practice, from concrete entities, near institutions, superficial facts. You might quote a hundred instances. Here is one: 'A gentleman, in speaking of a nobleman's wife of great rank and fortune, lamented very much that she had no children. A medical gentleman who was present observed, that to have no children was a great misfortune, but he had often observed it was *hereditary* in families.' This is what we mean by saying his mirth lies in the superficial relations of phenomena (some will say we are pompous, like the medical man); in the relation of one external fact to another external fact; of one detail of common life to another detail of common life. But this is not the highest type of humour. Taken as a whole, the universe is absurd. There seems an unalterable contradiction between the human mind and its employments. How can a *soul* be a merchant? What relation to an immortal being have the price of linseed, the fall of butter, the tare on tallow, or the brokerage on hemp? Can an undying creature debit 'petty expenses,' and charge for 'carriage paid'? All the

world's a stage;—' the satchel, and the shining morning face'—the ' strange oaths; '—' the bubble reputation '—the

> ' Eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws and modern instances.'

Can these things be real? Surely they are acting. What relation have they to the truth as we see it in theory? What connection with our certain hopes, our deep desires, our craving and infinite thought? ' In respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect it is a shepherd's life, it is nought.' The soul ties its shoe; the mind washes its hands in a basin. All is incongruous.

'*Shallow.* Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure; death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all; all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

'*Silence.* Truly, cousin, I was not there.

'*Shallow.* Death is certain.—Is old Double, of your town, living yet?

'*Silence.* Dead, sir.

'*Shallow.* Dead. See! See! He drew a good bow,—and dead. He shot a fine shoot. John of Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head.—Dead! He would have clapped i' the clout at fourscore, and carried you a forehand-shaft, a fourteen and fourteen and a-half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see.—How a score of ewes now?

'*Silence.* Thereafter as they be; a score of ewes may be worth ten pounds.

'*Shallow.* And is Double dead!—'

It is because Sydney Smith had so little of this Shakespearian humour, that there is a glare in his pages, and that in the midst of his best writing, we sigh for the soothing superiority of quieter writers.

Sydney Smith was not only the wit of the first Edinburgh, but likewise the divine. He was, to use his own expression, the only clergyman who in those days ' turned out ' to fight the battles of the Whigs. In some sort this was not so important. A curious abstinence from religious topics characterises the original Review. There is a wonderful omission of this most natural topic of speculation in the lives of Horner and Jeffrey. In truth, it would seem, that living in the incessant din of a

Calvinistic country, the best course for thoughtful and serious men was to be silent—at least they instinctively thought so. They felt no involuntary call to be theological teachers themselves, and gently recoiled from the coarse admonition around them. Even in the present milder time, few cultivated persons willingly think on the special dogmas of distinct theology. They do not deny them, but they live apart from them: they do not misbelieve them, but they are silent when they are stated. They do not question the existence of Kamschatka, but they have no call to busy themselves with Kamschatka; they abstain from peculiar tenets. Nor in truth is this, though much aggravated by existing facts, a mere accident of this age. There are some people to whom such a course of conduct is always natural: there are certain persons who do not, as it would seem cannot, feel all that others feel; who have, so to say, no *ear* for much of religion: who are in some sort out of its reach. 'It is impossible,' says a late divine of the Church of England, 'not to observe that innumerable persons (may we not say the majority of mankind?) who have a belief in God and immortality, have, nevertheless, scarcely any consciousness of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. They seem to live aloof from them in the world of business or of pleasure, "the common life of all men," not without a sense of right, and a rule of truth and honesty, yet insensible' to much which we need not name. 'They have never in their whole lives experienced the love of God, the sense of sin, or the need of forgiveness. Often they are remarkable for the purity of their morals; many of them have strong and disinterested attachments and quick human sympathies; sometimes a stoical feeling of uprightness, or a peculiar sensitiveness to dishonour. It would be a mistake to say that they are without religion. They join in its public acts; they are offended at profaneness or impiety; they are thankful for the blessings of life, and do not rebel against its misfortunes. Such men meet us at every step. They are those whom we know and associate with; honest in their dealings, respectable in their lives, decent in their conversation. The Scripture speaks to us of two classes, represented by the church and the world, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the friends and enemies of God. We cannot say in which of these two divisions we should find a place for them.' They believe always a kind of 'natural religion.' Now these

are what we may call, in the language of the present, Liberals. Those who can remember, or who will re-read our delineation of the Whig character, may observe its conformity. There is the same purity and delicacy, the same tranquil sense; an equal want of imagination, of impulsive enthusiasm, of shrinking fear. You need not speak like the above writer of 'peculiar doctrines,' the phenomenon is no speciality of a particular creed. Glance over the whole of history, as the classical world stood beside the Jewish; as Horace beside St. Paul; like the heavy ark and the buoyant waves, so are men in contrast with one another. You cannot imagine a classical Isaiah; you cannot fancy a Whig St. Dominic; there is no such thing as a Liberal Augustine. The deep sea of mysticism lies opposed to some natures; in some moods it is a sublime wonder; in others an 'impious ocean,'—they will never put forth on it at any time.

All this is intelligible, and in a manner beautiful as a character; but it is not equally excellent as a creed. A certain class of Liberal divines have endeavoured to petrify into a theory, a pure and placid disposition. In some respects Sydney Smith is one of these; his sermons are the least excellent of his writings; of course they are sensible and well-intentioned, but they have the defect of his school. With misdirected energy, these divines have laboured after a plain religion; they have forgotten that a quiet and definite mind is confined to a placid and definite world; that religion has its essence in awe, its charm in infinity, its sanction in dread; that its dominion is an inexplicable dominion; that mystery is its power. There is a reluctance in all such writers; they creep away from the unintelligible parts of the subject: they always seem to have something behind;—not to like to bring out what they know to be at hand. They are in their nature apologists; and, as George the Third said, 'I did not know the Bible needed an apology.' As well might the thunder be ashamed to roll, as religion hesitate to be too awful for mankind. The invective of Lucretius is truer than the placid patronage of the divine. Let us admire Liberals in life, but let us keep no terms with Paleyans in speculation.

And so we must draw to a conclusion. We have in some sort given a description of, with one great exception, the most remarkable men connected at its origin with the Edinburgh

Review. And that exception is a man of too fitful, defective, and strange greatness to be spoken of now. Henry Brougham must be left to after-times. Indeed, he would have marred the unity of our article. He was connected with the Whigs, but he never was one. His impulsive ardour is the opposite of their coolness; his irregular, discursive intellect contrasts with their quiet and perfecting mind. Of those of whom we have spoken, let us say, that if none of them attained to the highest rank of abstract intellect; if the disposition of none of them was ardent or glowing enough to hurry them forward to the extreme point of daring greatness; if only one can be said to have a lasting place in real literature, it is clear that they vanquished a slavish cohort; that they upheld the name of freemen in a time of bondmen; that they applied themselves to that which was real, and accomplished much which was very difficult; that the very critics who question their inimitable excellence will yet admire their just and scarcely imitable example.

Hartley Coleridge*
(1852)

HARTLEY COLERIDGE was not like the Duke of Wellington.† Children are urged by the example of the great statesman and warrior just departed—not indeed to neglect 'their book' as he did—but to be industrious and thrifty; to 'always perform business,' to 'beware of procrastination,' to 'NEVER fail to do their best:' good ideas, as may be ascertained by referring to the masterly despatches on the Mahratta transactions—'great events,' as the preacher continues, 'which exemplify the efficacy of diligence even in regions where the very advent of our religion is as yet but partially made known.' But

> 'What a wilderness were this sad world,
> If man were always man and never child!'

And it were almost a worse wilderness if there were not some, to relieve the dull monotony of activity, who are children through life; who act on wayward impulse, and whose will has never come; who toil not and who spin not; who always have 'fair Eden's simpleness:' and of such was Hartley Coleridge. 'Don't you remember,' writes Gray to Horace Walpole, 'when Lord B. and Sir H. C. and Viscount D., who are now great statesmen, were little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part I do not feel one bit older or wiser now than I did then.' For as some apply their minds to what is next them, and labour ever, and attain to governing the Tower, and entering the Trinity House,—to commanding armies, and applauding pilots,—so there are also some who are ever anxious to-day about what ought only to be considered to-morrow; who never get on; whom the earth neglects, and whom tradesmen little esteem; who are where they were; who cause grief, and are loved; that are at once a by-word and a blessing; who do not

**Hartley Coleridge's Lives of the Northern Worthies.* A new Edition. 3 vols. Moxon.

† This essay was published immediately after the death of the Duke of Wellington.

live in life, and it seems will not die in death: and of such was Hartley Coleridge.

A curious instance of poetic anticipation was in this instance vouchsafed to Wordsworth. When Hartley was six years old, he addressed to him these verses, perhaps the best ever written on a real and visible child:—

> 'O thou, whose fancies from afar are brought,
> Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel
> And fittest to unutterable thought
> The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol;
> Thou fairy voyager, that dost float
> In such clear water that thy boat
> May rather seem
> To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
> O blessed vision, happy child,
> Thou art so exquisitely wild,
> I think of thee with many fears
> For what may be thy lot in future years.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> O too industrious folly!
> O vain and causeless melancholy!
> Nature will either end thee quite,
> Or, lengthening out thy season of delight,
> Preserve for thee by individual right
> A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks.'

And so it was. As often happens, being very little of a boy in actual childhood, Hartley preserved into manhood and age all of boyhood which he had ever possessed—its beaming imagination and its wayward will. He had none of the natural roughness of that age. He never played—partly from weakness, for he was very small, but more from awkwardness. His uncle Southey used to say he had two left hands, and might have added that they were both useless. He could no more have achieved football, or mastered cricket, or kept in with the hounds than he could have followed Charles's Wain or played pitch and toss with Jupiter's satellites. Nor was he very excellent at school work. He showed, indeed, no deficiency. The Coleridge family have inherited from the old scholar of Ottery St. Mary a certain classical facility which could not

desert the son of Samuel Taylor. But his real strength was in his own mind. All children have a world of their own, as distinct from that of the grown people who gravitate around them as the dreams of girlhood from our prosaic life; as the ideas of the kitten that plays with the falling leaves, from those of her carnivorous mother that catches mice and is sedulous in her domestic duties. But generally about this interior existence, children are dumb. You have warlike ideas, but you cannot say to a sinewy relative, 'My dear aunt, I wonder when the big bush in the garden will begin to walk about; I'm sure it's a crusader, and I was cutting it all the day with my steel sword. But what do you think, aunt, for I'm puzzled about its legs, because you see, aunt, it has only *one* stalk; and besides, aunt, the leaves.' You cannot remark this in secular life, but you hack at the infelicitous bush till you do not altogether reject the idea that your small garden is Palestine, and yourself the most adventurous of knights. Hartley had this, of course, like any other dreamy child, but in his case it was accompanied with the faculty of speech, and an extraordinary facility in continuous story-telling. In the very earliest childhood he had conceived a complete outline of a country like England, whereof he was king himself, and in which there were many wars, and rumours of wars, and foreign relations and statesmen, and rebels and soldiers. 'My people, Derwent,' he used to begin, 'are giving me much pain; they want to go to war.' This faculty, as was natural, showed itself before he went to school, but he carried on the habit of fanciful narration even into that bleak and ungenial region. 'It was not,' says his brother, 'by a series of tales, but by one continuous tale, regularly evolved, and possessing a real unity, that he enchained the attention of his auditors, night after night, as we lay in bed, for a space of years, and not unfrequently for hours together.' . . . . 'There was certainly,' he adds, 'a great variety of persons sharply characterized, who appeared on the stage in combination and not in succession.' Connected, in Hartley, with this premature development of the imagination, there was a singular deficiency in what may be called the *sense* of reality. It is alleged that he hardly knew that Ejuxrea, which is the name of his kingdom, was not as solid a *terra firma* as Keswick or Ambleside. The deficiency showed itself on other topics. His father used to tell a story of his meta-

physical questioning. When he was about five years old, he was asked, doubtless by the paternal metaphysician, some question as to why he was called Hartley. 'Which Hartley?' replied the boy. 'Why, is there more than one Hartley?' 'Yes, there is a deal of Hartleys; there is Picture Hartley (Hazlitt had painted a picture of him), and Shadow Hartley, and there's Echo Hartley, and there's Catchmefast Hartley,' seizing his own arm very eagerly, and as if reflecting on the 'summject and ommject,' which is to say, being in hopeless confusion. We do not hear whether he was puzzled and perplexed by such difficulties in later life; and the essays which we are reviewing, though they contain much keen remark on the detail of human character, are destitute of the Germanic profundities; they do not discuss how existence is possible, nor enumerate the pure particulars of the soul itself. But considering the idle dreaminess of his youth and manhood, we doubt if Hartley ever got over his preliminary doubts—ever properly grasped the idea of fact and reality. This is not nonsense. If you attend acutely, you may observe that in few things do people differ more than in their perfect and imperfect realization of this earth. To the Duke of Wellington a coat was a coat; 'there was no mistake;' no reason to disbelieve it; and he carried to his grave a perfect and indubitable persuasion that he really did (what was his best exploit), without fluctuation, *shave* on the morning of the battle of Waterloo. You could not have made him doubt it. But to many people who will never be Field Marshals, there is on such points, not rational doubt, but instinctive questioning. 'Who the devil,' said Lord Byron, 'could *make* such a world? No one, I believe.' 'Cast your thoughts,' says a very different writer, 'back on the time when our ancient buildings were first reared. Consider the churches all around us; how many generations have passed since stone was put upon stone, till the whole edifice was finished! The first movers and instruments of its erection, the minds that planned it, and the limbs that wrought at it, the pious hands that contributed to it, and the holy lips that consecrated it, have long, long ago been taken away, yet we benefit by their good deed. Does it not seem strange that men should be able, not merely by acting on others, not by a continued influence carried on through many minds in succession, but by a single direct act, to come into contact with us,

and, as if with their own hand, to benefit us who live centuries later?' Or again, speaking of the lower animals: 'Can anything be more marvellous or startling, than that we should have a race of beings about us, whom we do but see, and as little know their state, or can describe their interests or their destiny, as we can tell of the inhabitants of the sun and moon. It is indeed a very overpowering thought, that we hold intercourse with creatures who are as much strangers to us, as mysterious as if they were the fabulous, unearthly beings, more powerful than man, and yet his slaves, which Eastern superstitions have invented. . . . . Cast your thoughts abroad on the whole number of them, large and small, in vast forests, or in the water, or in the air, and then say whether the presence of such countless multitudes, so various in their natures, so strange and wild in their shapes, is not' as incredible as anything can be. We go into a street, and see it thronged with men, and we say, Is it *true, are* there these men? We look on a creeping river, till we say, *is* there this river? We enter the law courts: we watch the patient Chancellor: we hear the droning wigs:—surely this is not real,—this is a dream,—nobody would do *that*,—it is a delusion. We are really, as the sceptics insinuate, but 'sensations and impressions,' in groups or alone, that float up and down; or, as the poet teaches, phantoms and images, whose idle stir but mocks the calm reality of the 'pictures on the wall.' All this will be called dreamy; but it is exactly because it *is* dreamy that we notice it. Hartley Coleridge was a dreamer: he began with Ejuxrea, and throughout his years, he but slumbered and slept. Life was to him a floating haze, a disputable mirage: you must not treat him like a believer in stocks and stones—you might as well say he was a man of business.

Hartley's school education is not worth recounting; but beside and along with it there was another education, on every side of him, singularly calculated to bring out the peculiar aptitudes of an imaginative mind, yet exactly, on that very account, very little likely to bring it down to fact and reality, to mix it with miry clay, or define its dreams by a daily reference to the common and necessary earth. He was bred up in the house of Mr. Southey, where, more than anywhere else in all England, it was held that literature and poetry are the aim and object of every true man, and that grocery and other affairs

lie beneath at an wholly immeasurable distance, to be attended to by the inferior animals. In Hartley's case the seed fell on fitting soil. In youth, and even in childhood, he was a not unintelligent listener to the unspeakable talk of the Lake poets.

'It was so,' writes his brother, 'rather than by a regular course of study, that he was educated; by desultory reading, by the living voice of Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, Lloyd, Wilson, and De Quincey; and again, by homely familiarity with townsfolk and countryfolk of every degree; lastly, by daily recurring hours of solitude—by lonely wanderings with the murmur of the Brathay in his ear.'

Thus he lived till the time came that he should go to Oxford, and naturally enough, it seems, he went up with much hope and strong excitement—for quiet and calm as seem those ancient dormitories—to him, as to many, the going among them seemed the first entrance into the real world—the end of torpidity—the beginning of life; he had often stood by the white Rydal Water, and thought it was coming, and now it was come in fact. At first his Oxford life was prosperous enough. An old gentleman, who believes that he too was once an undergraduate, well remembers how Hartley's eloquence was admired at wine parties and breakfast parties. 'Leaning his head on one shoulder, turning up his dark bright eyes, and swinging backwards and forwards in his chair, he would hold forth by the hour, for no one wished to interrupt him, on whatever subject might have been started—either of literature, politics, or religion—with an originality of thought, a force of illustration, which,' the narrator doubts, 'if any man then living, except his father, could have surpassed.' The singular gift of continuous conversation—for singular it is if in any degree agreeable—seems to have come to him by nature, and it was through life the one quality which he relied on for attraction in society. Its being agreeable is to be accounted for mainly by its singularity; if one knew any respectable number of declaimers—if any proportion of one's acquaintance should receive the gift of the English language, and 'improve each shining hour' with liquid eloquence, how we should regret their present dumb and torpid condition! If we are to be dull—which our readers will admit to be an appointment of providence—surely we will be dull in silence. Do not sermons exist, and are they not a warning to mankind?

In fact, the habit of common and continuous speech is a symptom of mental deficiency. It proceeds from not knowing what is going on in other people's minds. S. T. Coleridge, it is well known, talked to everybody, and to everybody alike; like a Christian divine, he did not regard persons. 'That is a fine opera, Mr. Coleridge,' said a young lady, some fifty years back. 'Yes, ma'am; and I remember Kant somewhere makes a very similar remark for, as *we* know, the idea of philosophical infinity—.' Now, this sort of talk will answer with two sorts of people—with comfortable, stolid, solid people, who don't understand it at all—who don't feel that they ought to understand it—who feel that they ought not—that *they* are to sell treacle and appreciate figs—but that there *is* this transcendental superlunary sphere, which is known to others—which is now revealed in the spiritual speaker, the unmitigated oracle, the evidently celestial sound. That the dreamy orator himself has no more notion what is passing in their minds than they have what is running through his, is of no consequence at all. If he did know it, he would be silent, he would be jarred to feel how utterly he was misunderstood, it would break the flow of his everlasting words. Much better that he should run on in a never-pausing stream, and that the wondering rustics should admire for ever. The basis of the entire entertainment is that neither should comprehend the other.—But in a degree yet higher is the society of an omniscient orator agreeable to young men, and particularly—as in Hartley's case—to clever undergraduates. All young men like what is theatrical, and by a fine dispensation all clever young men like notions. They want to have opinions, to hear about opinions, to know about opinions. The ever-flowing rhetorician gratifies both propensions. He is a notional *spectacle*. Like the sophist of old, he *is* something and says something. The vagabond speculator in all ages will take hold on those who wish to reason and want premises—who wish to argue and want theses—who desire demonstrations, and have but presumptions. And so it was acceptable enough that Hartley should make the low tones of his musical voice glide sweetly and spontaneously through the cloisters of Merton, debating the old questions, the 'fate, free-will, foreknowledge,'—the points that Ockham and Scotus propounded in these same enclosures—the common riddles, the everlasting enigmas of mankind. It attracts the scorn of

middle-aged men (who depart *πρὸς τὰ ἱερά*, and fancy they are wise), but it is a pleasant thing that impact of hot thought upon hot thought, of young thought upon young thought, of new thought upon new thought. It comes to the fortunate once, but to no one a second time thereafter for ever.

Nor was Hartley undistinguished in the regular studies of the University. A regular, exact, accurate scholar he never was; but even in his early youth he perhaps knew much more and understood much more of ancient literature than seven score of schoolmasters and classmen. He had, probably, in his mind a picture of the ancient world, or of some of it, while the dry *literati* only know the combinations and permutations of the Greek alphabet. There is a pleasant picture of him at this epoch, recorded by an eye-witness. 'My attention,' he narrates, ' was at first aroused by seeing from a window a figure flitting about amongst the trees and shrubs of the garden with quick and agitated motion. This was Hartley, who in the ardour of preparing for his college examination, did not even take his meals with the family, but snatched a hasty morsel in his own apartment, and only sought the free air when the fading daylight prevented him from seeing his books. Having found who he was that so mysteriously flitted about the garden, I was determined to lose no time in making his acquaintance, and through the instrumentality of Mrs. Coleridge I paid Hartley a visit in what he called his den. This was a room afterwards converted by Mr. Southey '—as what chink was not?—' into a supplementary library, but then appropriated as a study to Hartley, and presenting a most picturesque and student-like disorder of scattered pamphlets and folios.' This is not a picture of the business-like reading man; one wonders what fraction of his time he did read. But it was probably the happiest period of his life. There was no coarse prosaic action there. Much musing, little studying,—fair scholarship, an atmosphere of the classics, curious fancies, much perusing of pamphlets, light thoughts on heavy folios—these make the meditative poet but not the technical and patient-headed scholar; yet, after all, he was happy, and obtained a second class.

A more suitable exercise, as it would have seemed at first sight, was supplied by that curious portion of Oxford routine, the Annual Prize Poem. This, he himself tells us, was, in his

academic years, the real and single object of his ambition. His reason is, for an autobiographical reason, decidedly simple. 'A great poet,' he says, 'I should not have imagined myself, for I knew well enough that the verses were no great things.' But he entertained at that period of life—he was twenty-one—a favourable opinion of young ladies; and he seems to have ascertained, possibly from actual trial, that verses were not in themselves a very emphatic attraction. Singular as it may sound, the ladies selected were not only insensible to what is, after all, a metaphysical line, the distinction between good poetry and bad, but were almost indifferent to poetry itself. Yet the experiment was not quite conclusive. Verses might fail in common life, and yet succeed in the Sheldonian theatre. It is plain that they would be *read out*; it occurred to him, as he naïvely relates, that if he should appear 'as a prizeman,' 'as an intelligible reciter of poetry,' he would be an object of 'some curiosity to the fair promenaders in Christchurch Meadow;' that the young ladies 'with whom he was on bowing and speaking terms, might have felt a satisfaction in being known to know me, which they had never experienced before.' 'I should,' he adds, 'have deemed myself a prodigious lion, and it was a character I was weak enough to covet more than that of poet, scholar, or philosopher.'

In fact, he did not get the prize. The worthy East Indian, who imagined that, in leaving a bequest for a prize to poetry, he should be as sure of possessing poetry for his money as of eggs, if he had chosen eggs, or of butter, if he had chosen butter, did not estimate rightly the nature of poetry, or the nature of the human mind. The mechanical parts of rhythm and metre are all that a writer can be certain of producing, or that a purchaser can be sure of obtaining; and these an industrious person will find in any collection of the Newdegate poems, together with a fine assortment of similes and sentiments, respectively invented and enjoined by Shem and Japhet for and to the use of after generations. And there is a peculiar reason why a great poet (besides his being, as a man of genius, rather more likely than another, to find a difficulty in the preliminary technicalities of art) should not obtain an academical prize, to be given for excellent verses to people of about twenty-one. It is a bad season. 'The imagination,' said a great poet of the very age, 'of a boy is healthy, and

the mature imagination of a man is healthy, but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted.'* And particularly in a real poet, where the disturbing influences of passion and fancy are most likely to be in excess, will this unhealthy tinge be most likely to be excessive and conspicuous. Nothing in the style of Endymion would have a chance of a prize; there are no complete conceptions, no continuance of adequate words. What is worse, there are no defined thoughts, or aged illustrations. The characteristic of the whole is beauty and novelty, but it is beauty which is not formed, and novelty which is strange and wavering. Some of these defects are observable in the copy of verses on the 'Horses of Lysippus,' which Hartley Coleridge contributed to the list of unsuccessful attempts. It does not contain so much originality as we might have expected; on such a topic we anticipated more nonsense; a little we are glad to say, there is, and also that there is an utter want of those even raps, which are the music of prize poems,—which were the right rhythm for Pope's elaborate sense, but are quite unfit for dreamy classics or contemplative enthusiasm. If Hartley, like Pope, had been the son of a shopkeeper, he would not have received the paternal encouragement, but rather a reprimand,—'Boy, boy, these be bad rhymes;' and so, too, believed a grizzled and cold examiner.

A much worse failure was at hand. He had been elected to a Fellowship, in what was at that time the only open foundation in Oxford, Oriel College, an event which shows more exact scholarship in Hartley, or more toleration in the academical authorities for the grammatical delinquencies of a superior man, than we should have been inclined, *a priori*, to attribute to either of them. But it soon became clear that Hartley was not exactly suited to that place. Decorum is the essence, pomposity the advantage, of tutors. These Hartley had not. Besides the serious defects which we shall mention immediately, he was essentially an absent and musing, and therefore at times a highly indecorous man; and though not defective in certain kinds of vanity, there was no tinge in his manner of scholastic dignity. A schoolmaster should have an atmosphere of awe, and walk wonderingly, as if he was amazed

* Keats in the Preface to Endymion.

at being himself. But an excessive sense of the ludicrous disabled Hartley altogether from the acquisition of this valuable habit; perhaps he never really attempted to obtain it. He accordingly never became popular as a tutor, or was described as 'exercising an influence over young persons.' Moreover, however excellently suited Hartley's eloquence might be to the society of undergraduates, it was out of place at the Fellows' table. This is said to be a dull place. The excitement of early thought has passed away; the excitements of active manhood are unknown. A certain torpidity seems natural there. We find too that probably for something to say, he was in those years rather fond of exaggerated denunciation of the powers that be. This is not the habit most grateful to the heads of houses. 'Sir,' said a great authority, 'do you deny that Lord Derby ought to be Prime Minister? you might as well say, that I ought not to be Warden of So and So.' These habits rendered poor Hartley no favourite with the leading people of his college, and no great prospective shrewdness was required to predict that he would fare but ill, if any sufficient occasion should be found for removing from the place, a person so excitable and so little likely to be of use in inculcating 'safe' opinions among the surrounding youth.

Unhappily, the visible morals of Hartley offered an easy occasion. It is not quite easy to gather from the narrative of his brother the exact nature or full extent of his moral delinquencies, but enough is shown to warrant, according to the rules, the unfavourable judgment of the collegiate authorities. He describes, probably truly, the commencement of his errors —'I verily believe that I should have gone crazy, silly, mad with vanity, had I obtained the prize for my "Horses of Lysippus." It was the only occasion in my life wherein I was keenly disappointed, for it was the only one upon which I felt any confident hope. I had made myself very sure of it; and the intellgience that not I but Macdonald was the lucky man, absolutely stupefied me; yet I contrived for a time to lose all sense of my misfortunes in exultation for Burton's success .... I sang, I danced, I whistled, I ran from room to room, announcing the great tidings, and tried to persuade myself that I cared nothing at all for my own case. But it would not do. It was bare sands with me the next day. It was not the mere loss of the prize, but the feeling or phantasy of an adverse

destiny. . . . . I foresaw that all my aims and hopes would prove frustrate and abortive; and from that time I date my downward declension, my impotence of will, and my melancholy recklessness. It was the first time I sought relief in wine, which, as usual in such cases, produced not so much intoxication as downright madness.' Cast in an uncongenial society, requiring to live in an atmosphere of respect and affection—and surrounded by gravity and distrust—misconstrued and half tempted to maintain the misconstruction; with the waywardness of childhood without the innocency of its impulses; with the passions of manhood without the repressive vigour of a man's will,—he lived as a woman lives that is lost and forsaken, who sins ever and hates herself for sinning, but who sins, perhaps, more on that very account; because she requires some relief from the keenness of her own reproach; because, in her morbid fancy, the idea is ever before her; because her petty will is unable to cope with the daily craving and the horrid thought—that she may not lose her own identity —that she may not give in to the rigid, the distrustful, and the calm.

There is just this excuse for Hartley, whatever it may be worth, that the weakness was hereditary. We do not as yet know, it seems most likely that we shall never know, the precise character of his father. But with all the discrepancy concerning the details, enough for our purpose, is certain of the outline. We know that he lived many and long years a prey to weaknesses and vice of this very description; and though it be false and mischievous to speak of hereditary vice, it is most true and wise to observe the mysterious fact of hereditary temptation. Doubtless it is strange that the nobler emotions and the inferior impulses, their peculiar direction or their proportionate strength, the power of a fixed idea—that the inner energy of the very will, which seems to issue from the inmost core of our complex nature, and to typify, if anything does, the pure essence of the immortal soul—that these and such as these should be transmitted by material descent, as though they were an accident of the body, the turn of an eyebrow or the feebleness of a joint,—if this were not obvious, it would be as amazing, perhaps more amazing, than any fact which we know; it looks not only like predestinated, but even heritable election. But explicable or inexplicable—to be

wondered at or not wondered at—the fact is clear; tendencies and temptations are transmitted even to the fourth generation both for good and for evil, both in those who serve God and in those who serve Him not. Indeed, the weakness before us seems essentially connected—perhaps we may say on a final examination essentially identical—with the dreaminess of mind, the inapprehensiveness of reality which we remarked upon before. Wordsworth used to say, that 'at a particular stage of his mental progress he used to be frequently so wrapt into an unreal transcendental world of ideas, that the external world seemed no longer to exist in relation to him, and he had to convince himself of its existence by *clasping a tree* or something that happened to be near him.' But suppose a mind which did not feel acutely the sense of reality which others feel, in hard contact with the tangible universe; which was blind to the distinction between the palpable and the impalpable, or rather lived in the latter in preference to, and nearly to the exclusion of, the former. What is to fix such a mind, what is to strengthen it, to give it a fulcrum? To exert itself, the will, like the arm, requires to have an obvious and a definite resistance, to know where it is, why it is, whence it comes, and whither it goes. 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of,' says the type of the dreamy character. The difficulty of Hamlet is that he cannot quite believe that his duty is to be done where it lies, and immediately. Partly from the natural effect of a vision of a spirit which is not, but more from native constitution and instinctive bent, he is for ever speculating on the reality of existence, the truth of the world. 'How,' discusses Kant, 'is Nature in general possible?' and so asked Hamlet too. With this feeling on his mind, persuasion is useless and argument in vain. Examples gross as earth exhort him, but they produce no effect; but he thinks and thinks the more.

> 'Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,—
> A thought which quarter'd hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward,—I do not know
> Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do,"
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do 't.'

Hartley himself well observes that on such a character the likelihood of action is inversely as the force of the motive and the time for deliberation. The stronger the reason, the more certain the scepticism? *Can* anything be so certain? Does not the excess of the evidence alleged make it clear that there is something behind, something on the other side? Search then diligently lest anything be overlooked. Reflection 'puzzles the will,' Necessity 'benumbs like a torpedo:' and so

> 'The native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard, their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.'

Why should we say any more? We do but 'chant snatches of old tunes.' But in estimating men like the Coleridges—the son even more than the father—we must take into account this peculiar difficulty—this dreamy unbelief—this daily scepticism—this haunting unreality—and imagine that some may not be quite responsible either for what they do, or for what they do not—because they are bewildered, and deluded, and perplexed, and want the faculty as much to comprehend their difficulty as to subdue it.

The Oxford life of Hartley is all his life. The failure of his prospects there, in his brother's words, 'deprived him of the residue of his years.' The biography afterwards goes to and fro—one attempt after another failing, some beginning in much hope, but even the sooner for that reason issuing in utter despair. His literary powers came early to full perfection. For some time after his expulsion from Oriel he was resident in London, and the poems written there are equal, perhaps are superior, to any which he afterwards produced. This sonnet may serve as a specimen:—

> 'In the great city we are met again
> Where many souls there are, that breathe and die
> Scarce knowing more of nature's potency
> Than what they learn from heat or cold or rain,
> The sad vicissitude of weary pain:—
> For busy man is lord of ear and eye,
> And what hath Nature, but the vast, void sky,

And the thronged river toiling to the main?
Oh! say not so, for she shall have her part
In every smile, in every tear that falls,
And she shall hide her in the secret heart
Where love persuades and sterner duty calls;
But worse it were than death or sorrow's smart
To live without a friend within these walls.'

He soon, however, went down to the lakes, and there he with a single exception lived and died. This exception was a residence at Leeds, during which he brought out, besides a volume containing his best poems, the book which stands at the head of our article—the Lives of Northern Worthies. We selected the book, we confess, with the view mainly of bringing a remarkable character before the notice of our readers—but in itself the work is an excellent one, and of a rare kind.

Books are for various purposes—tracts to teach, almanacs to sell, poetry to make pastry, but this is the rarest sort of book, a book to *read*. As Dr. Johnson said, 'Sir, a good book is one you can hold in your hand, and take to the fire.' Now there are extremely few books which can, with any propriety, be so treated. When a great author, as Grote or Gibbon, has devoted a whole life of horrid industry to the composition of a large history, one feels one ought not to touch it with a mere hand—it is not respectful. The idea of slavery hovers over the 'Decline and Fall.' Fancy a stiffly dressed gentleman. in a stiff chair, slowly writing that stiff compilation in a stiff hand, it is enough to stiffen you for life. Or is poetry readable? Of course it is rememberable; when you have it in the mind, it clings; if by heart, it haunts. Imagery comes from it; songs which lull the ear, heroines that waste the time. But this Biographia is actually read; a man is glad to take it up, and slow to lay it down; it is a book which is truly valuable, for it is truly pleasing; and which a man who has once had it in his library would miss from his shelves, not only in the common way, by a physical vacuum, but by a mental deprivation. This strange quality it owes to a peculiarity of style. Many people give many theories of literary composition, and Dr. Blair, whom we will read, is sometimes said to have exhausted the subject, but, unless he has proved the contrary, we believe that the knack in style is to write like a human

being. Some think they must be wise, some elaborate, some concise; Tacitus wrote like a pair of stays; some startle, as Thomas Carlyle, or a comet, inscribing with his tail. But legibility is given to those who neglect these notions, and are willing to be themselves, to write their own thoughts in their own words, in the simplest words, in the words wherein they were thought; and such, and so great, was in this book the magnanimity of Hartley.

As has been said, from his youth onwards, Hartley's outward life was a simple blank. Much writing, and much musing, some intercourse with Wordsworth, some talking to undergraduate readers or lake ladies, great loneliness, and much intercourse with the farmers of Cumberland—these pleasures, simple enough, most of them, were his life. The extreme pleasure of the peasantry in his conversation, is particularly remarked. 'Aye, but Mr. Coleridge talks fine,' observed one. 'I would go through fire and water for Mr. C.,' interjected another. His father, with real wisdom, had provided (in part, at least) for his necessary wants in the following manner:—

'This is a codicil to my last will and testament.

'S. T. Coleridge.

'Most desirous to secure, as far as in me lies, for my dear son Hartley, the tranquillity essential to any continued and successful exertion of his literary talents, and which, from the like characters of our minds in this respect, I know to be especially requisite for his happiness, and persuaded that he will recognise in this provision that anxious affection by which it is dictated, I affix this codicil to my last will and testament. . . . . And I hereby request them (the said trustees) to hold the sum accruing to Hartley Coleridge from the equal division of my total bequest between him, his brother Derwent, and his sister Sara, after his mother's decease, to dispose of the interests or proceeds of the same portion to or for the use of my dear son Hartley Coleridge, at such time or times, in such manner, or under such conditions, as they, the trustees above named, know to be my wish, and shall deem conducive to the attainment of my object in adding the codicil, namely, the anxious wish to ensure for my son the continued means of a home, in which I comprise board, lodging, and raiment. Providing that nothing in this codicil shall be so interpreted as to

interfere with my son H. C.'s freedom of choice respecting his place of residence, or with his power of disposing of his portion by will after his decease according as his own judgments and affections may decide.'

An excellent provision, which would not, however, by the English law, have disabled the 'said Hartley' from depriving himself of 'the continued means of a home' by alienating the principal of the bequest; since the jurisprudence of this country has no legal definition of 'prodigality,' and does not consider any person incompetent to manage his pecuniary affairs unless he be quite and certainly insane. Yet there undoubtedly are persons, and poor Hartley was one of them, who though in general perfectly sane, and even with superior powers of thought or fancy, are as completely unable as the most helpless lunatic to manage any pecuniary transactions, and to whom it would be a great gain to have perpetual guardians and compulsory trustees. But such people are rare, and few principles are so English as the maxim *de minimis non curat lex.*

He lived in this way for thirty years or nearly so, but there is nothing to tell of all that time. He died on the 6th of January, 1849, and was buried in Grasmere churchyard—the quietest place in England, 'by the yews,' as Arnold says, 'that Wordsworth planted, the Rotha with its big silent pools passing by.' It was a shining January day when Hartley was borne to the grave. 'Keep the ground for us,' said Mr. Wordsworth to the sexton, 'we are old, and it cannot be long.'

We have described Hartley's life at length for a peculiar reason. It is necessary to comprehend his character, to appreciate his works; and there is no way of delineating character but by a selection of characteristic sayings and actions. All poets, as is commonly observed, are delineated in their poems, but in very different modes. Each minute event in the melancholy life of Shelley is frequently alluded to in his writings. The tender and reverential character of Virgil is everywhere conspicuous in his pages. It is clear that Chaucer was shrewd. We seem to have talked with Shakespeare, though we have forgotten the facts of his life; but it is not by minute allusion, or a tacit influence, or a genial and delightful sympathy, that a writer like Hartley Coleridge leaves the impress of himself, but in a more direct manner, which it will take a few words to describe.

Poetry begins in Impersonality. Homer is a voice—a fine voice, a fine eye, and a brain that drew with light; and this is all we know. The natural subjects of the first art are the scenes and events in which the first men naturally take an interest. They don't care—who does?—for a kind old man; but they want to hear of the exploits of their ancestors—of the heroes of their childhood—of them that their fathers saw—of the founders of their own land—of wars, and rumours of wars—of great victories boldly won—of heavy defeats firmly borne—of desperate disasters unsparingly retrieved. So in all countries—Siegfried, or Charlemagne, or Arthur,—they are but attempts at an Achilles: the subject is the same—the κλέα ἀνδρῶν and the death that comes to all. But then the mist of battles passes away, and the sound of the daily conflict no longer hurtles in the air, and a generation arises skilled with the skill of peace, and refined with the refinement of civilisation, yet still remembering the old world, still appreciating the old life, still wondering at the old men, and ready to receive, at the hand of the poet, a new telling of the old tale—a new idealisation of the legendary tradition. This is the age of dramatic art, when men wonder at the big characters of old as schoolboys at the words of Æschylus, and try to find in their own breasts the roots of those monstrous, but artistically developed impersonations. With civilisation too comes another change: men wish not only to tell what they have seen, but also to express what they are conscious of. Barbarians feel only hunger, and that is not lyrical, but as time runs on, arise gentler emotions and finer moods and more delicate desires which need expression, and require from the artist's fancy the lightest touches and the most soothing and insinuating words. Lyrical poetry, too, as we know, is of various kinds. Some, as the war song, approach to the epic, depict events and stimulate to triumph; others are love songs to pour out wisdom, others sober to describe champagne; some passive and still, and expressive of the higher melancholy, as Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard.' But with whatever differences of species and class, the essence of lyrical poetry remains in all identical; it is designed to express, and when successful does express, some one mood, some single sentiment, some isolated longing in human nature. It deals not with man as a whole, but with man piecemeal, with man in a scenic aspect, with man in a peculiar light. Hence,

lyrical poets must not be judged literally from their lyrics: they are discourses; they require to be reduced into the scale of ordinary life, to be stripped of the enraptured element, to be clogged with gravitating prose. Again, moreover, and in course of time, the advance of ages and the progress of civilisation appear to produce a new species of poetry which is distinct from the lyrical, though it grows out of it, and contrasted with the epic, though in a single respect it exactly resembles it. This kind may be called the *self-delineative*, for in it the poet deals not with a particular desire, sentiment, or inclination in his own mind, not with a special phase of his own character, not with his love of war, his love of ladies, his melancholy, but with his mind viewed as a whole, with the entire essence of his own character. The first requisite of this poetry is truth. It is in Plato's phrase the soul 'itself by itself' aspiring to view and take account of the particular notes and marks that distinguish it from all other souls. The sense of reality is necessary to excellence; the poet being himself, speaks like one who has authority; he knows and must not deceive. This species of poetry, of course, adjoins on the lyrical, out of which it historically arises; such a poem as the 'Elegy' is, as it were, on the borders of the two, for while it expresses but a single emotion, meditative, melancholy, you seem to feel that this sentiment is not only then and for a moment the uppermost, but (as with Gray it was) the habitual mood, the pervading emotion of his whole life. Moreover, in one especial peculiarity, this sort of poetry is analogous to the narrative or epic. Nothing certainly can, in a general aspect, be more distantly removed one from another, the one dealing in external objects and stirring events, the other with the stillness and repose of the poet's mind, but still in a single characteristic the two coincide. They describe character as the painters say *in mass*. The defect of the drama is, that it can delineate only motion. If a thoughtful person will compare the character of Achilles, as we find it in Homer, with the more surpassing creations of dramatic invention, say with Lear or Othello, he will perhaps feel that character in repose, character on the lonely beach, character in marble, character in itself, is more clearly and perfectly seen in the epic narrative, than in the conversational drama. It of course requires immense skill to make mere talk exhibit a man as he is *ἐτάρων ἄφαρ*. Now this quality of epic poetry the self-

delineative precisely shares with it. It describes a character—the poet's—alone by itself. And therefore, when the great master in both kinds did not hesitate to turn aside from his 'high argument' to say—

> 'More safe I sing with mortal voice unchanged
> To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,'

pedants may prose as they please about the 'impropriety' of 'interspersing' species of composition which are by nature remote; but Milton felt more profoundly that in its treatment of character the egotistical poetry is allied to the epic; that he was putting together elements which would harmoniously combine; that he was but exerting the same faculties in either case—being guided thereto by a sure instinct, the desire of genius to handle and combine every one of the subjects on which it is genius.

Now it is in this self-delineative species of poetry that, in our judgment, Hartley Coleridge has attained to nearly, if not quite the highest excellence; it pervades his writings everywhere. But a few sonnets may be quoted to exemplify it:—

> 'We parted on the mountains, as two streams
> From one clear spring pursue their several ways;
> And thy fleet course hath been through many a maze
> In foreign lands, where silvery Padus gleams
> To that delicious sky, whose glowing beams
> Brightened the tresses that old poets praise,
> Where Petrarch's patient love and artful lays,
> And Ariosto's song of many themes,
> Moved the soft air.—But I, a lazy brook,
> As close pent up within my native dell,
> Have crept along from nook to shady nook,
> Where flow'rets blow and whispering Naiads dwell.
> Yet now we meet that parted were so wide,
> For rough and smooth to travel side by side.

> 'Once I was young, and fancy was my all,
> My love, my joy, my grief, my hope, my fear,
> And ever ready as an infant's tear,
> Whate'er in Fancy's kingdom might befall,
> Some quaint device had Fancy still at call,
> With seemly verse to greet the coming cheer;

Such grief to soothe, such airy hope to rear,
To sing the birth-song, or the funeral
Of such light love, it was a pleasant task;
But ill accord the quirks of wayward glee
That wears affliction for a wanton mask,
With woes that bear not Fancy's livery,
With Hope that scorns of Fate its fate to ask,
But is itself its own sure destiny.

'Too true it is my time of power was spent
In idly watering weeds of casual growth
That wasted energy to desperate sloth
Declined, and fond self-seeking discontent;
That the huge debt for all that nature lent
I sought to cancel,—and was nothing loth,
To deem myself an outlaw, severed both
From duty and from hope,—yea, blindly sent
Without an errand where I would to stray:—
Too true it is, that knowing now my state,
I weakly mourn the sin I ought to hate,
Nor love the law I yet would fain obey:
But true it is, above all law and fate
Is Faith, abiding the appointed day.

'Long time a child, and still a child when years
Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I:
For yet I lived like one not born to die,
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears;
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears—
But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep, and waking,
I waked to sleep no more, at once o'ertaking
The vanguard of my age, with all arrears
Of duty on my back. Nor child, nor man,
Nor youth, nor sage, I find my head is gray,
For I have lost the race I never ran;
A rathe December blights my lagging May,
And still I am a child, tho' I be old,
Time is my debtor for my years untold.'

Indeed, the whole series of sonnets with which the earliest and best work of Hartley began is (with a casual episode on others), mainly and essentially a series on himself. Perhaps

there is something in the structure of the sonnet rather adapted to this species of composition. It is too short for narrative, too artificial for the intense passions, too complex for the simple, too elaborate for the domestic; but in an impatient world where there is not a premium on self-describing, who so would speak of himself must be wise and brief, artful and composed—and in these respects he will be aided by the concise dignity of the tranquil sonnet.

It is remarkable that in this, too, Hartley Coleridge resembled his father. Turn over the early poems of S. T. Coleridge, the minor poems (we exclude the 'Mariner' and 'Christabel,' which are his epics), but the small shreds which Bristol worshipped and Cottle paid for, and you will be disheartened by utter dulness. Taken on a decent average, and perhaps excluding a verse here and there, it really seems to us that they are inferior to the daily works of the undeserving and multiplied poets. If any reader will peruse any six of the several works entituled 'Poems by a Young Gentleman,' we believe he will find the refined anonymity less insipid than the small productions of Samuel Taylor. There will be less puff and less ostentation. The reputation of the latter was caused not by their merit but by their time. Fifty years ago, people believed in metre, and it is plain that Coleridge (Southey may be added, for that matter) believed in it also; the people in Bristol said that these two were wonderful men, because they had written wonderfully small verses;—and such is human vanity, that both for a time accepted the creed. In Coleridge, who had large speculative sense, the hallucination was not permanent; there are many traces that he rated his Juvenilia at their value; but poor Southey, who lived with domestic women, actually died in the delusion that his early works were perfect—except that he tried to 'amend' the energy out of Joan of Arc, which was the only good thing in it. His wife did not doubt that he had produced stupendous works. Why, then, should he? But experience has now shown that a certain metrical facility, and a pleasure in the metrical expression of certain sentiments, are in youth extremely common. Many years ago, Mr. Moore is reported to have remarked to Sir Walter Scott, that hardly a magazine was then published, which did not contain verses that would have made a sensation when they were young men. 'Confound it, Tom,' was the reply, 'what luck it

was *we* were born before all these fellows.' And though neither Moore nor Scott are to be confounded with the nameless and industrious versifiers of the present day, yet it must be allowed that they owed to their time and their position—to the small quantity of rhyme in the market of the moment, and the extravagant appreciation of their early productions—much of that popular encouragement which induced them to labour upon more excellent compositions and to train themselves to write what they will be remembered by. But dismissing these considerations, and returning to the minor poems of S. T. Coleridge, although we fearlessly assert that it is impossible for any sane man to set any value on—say the Religious Musings—an absurd attempt to versify an abstract theory, or the essay on the Pixies, who had more fun in them than the reader of it could suspect—it still is indisputable that scattered here and there through these poems, there are lines about himself (lines, as he said in later life, 'in which the subjective object views itself subjectivo-objectively,') which rank high in that form of art. Of this kind are the Tombless Epitaph, for example, or the lines,—

> 'To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assigned
> Energic Reason and a shaping mind,
> The daring ken of truth; the Patriot's part,
> And Pity's sigh, that breathes the gentle heart;
> Sloth-jaundiced all! and from my graspless hand
> Drop friendship's priceless pearls, like hour-glass sand.
> I weep, yet stoop not! the faint anguish flows,
> A dreamy pang in morning's fev'rish doze;'

and so on. In fact, it would appear that the tendency to, and the faculty for, self-delineation, are very closely connected with the dreaminess of disposition and impotence of character which we spoke of just now. Persons very subject to these can grasp no external object, comprehend no external being; they can do no external thing, and therefore they are left to themselves. Their own character is the only one which they can view as a whole, or depict as a reality; of every other they may have glimpses, and acute glimpses, like the vivid truthfulness of particular dreams; but no settled appreciation, no connected development, no regular sequence whereby they may be exhibited on paper or conceived in the imagination. If other

qualities are supposed to be identical, those will be most egotistical who only know themselves; the people who talk most of themselves will be those who talk best.

In the execution of minor verses, we think we could show that Hartley should have the praise of surpassing his father; but, nevertheless, it would be absurd, on a general view, to compare the two men. Samuel Taylor was so much bigger; what there was in the son was equally good, perhaps, but then there was not much of it; outwardly and inwardly he was essentially little. In poetry, for example, the father has produced two longish poems, which have worked themselves right down to the extreme depths of the popular memory, and stay there very firmly, in part from their strangeness, but in part from their power. Of Hartley, nothing of this kind is to be found, he could not write connectedly; he wanted steadiness of purpose, or efficiency of will, to write so voluntarily; and his genius did not, involuntarily, and out of its unseen workings, present him with continuous creations; on the contrary, his mind teemed with little fancies, and a new one came before the first had attained any enormous magnitude. As his brother observed, he wanted 'back thought.' 'On what plan, Mr. Coleridge, are you arranging your books?' inquired a lady. 'Plan, madam, I have no plan; at first I had a principle; but then I had another, and now I do not know.' The same contrast between the 'shaping mind' of the father, and the gentle and minute genius of the son, is said to have been very plain in their conversation. That of Samuel was continuous, diffused, comprehensive.

> 'Strongly it bears us along in swelling and limitless motion,
> Nothing before and nothing behind, but the sky and the ocean.'

'Great talker, certainly,' said Hazlitt, '*if* you will let him start from no *data*, and come to no conclusion.' The talk of Hartley on the contrary, though continuous in time, was detached in meaning; stating hints and observations on particular subjects; glancing lightly from side to side, but throwing no intense light on any, and exhausting none. It flowed gently over small doubts and pleasant difficulties, rippling for a minute sometimes into bombast, but lightly recovering and falling quietly in 'melody back.'

By way, it is likely, of compensation to Hartley for this

great deficiency in what his father imagined to be his own *forte*, —the power of conceiving a whole,—Hartley possessed, in a considerable degree, a species of sensibility to which the former was nearly a stranger. 'The mind of S. T. Coleridge,' says one who had every means of knowing and observing, 'was not in the least under the influence of external objects.' Except in the writings written during daily and confidential intimacy with Wordsworth (an exception that may be obviously accounted for), no trace can perhaps be found of any new image or metaphor from natural scenery. There is some story too of his going for the first time to York, and by the Minster, and never looking up at it. But Hartley's poems exhibit a great sensibility to a certain aspect of exterior nature, and great fanciful power of presenting that aspect in the most charming and attractive forms. It is likely that the London boyhood of the elder Coleridge was,—added to a strong abstractedness which was born with him,—a powerful cause in bringing about the curious mental fact, that a great poet, so susceptible to every other species of refining and delightful feeling, should have been utterly destitute of any perception of beauty in landscape or nature. We must not forget that S. T. C. was a blue-coat boy,—what do any of them know about fields? And similarly we require in Hartley's case, before we can quite estimate his appreciation of nature, to consider his position, his circumstances, and especially his time.

Now it came to pass in those days that William Wordsworth went up into the hills. It has been attempted in recent years to establish that the object of his life was to teach Anglicanism. A whole life of him has been written by an official gentleman, with the apparent view of establishing that the great poet was a believer in rood-lofts, an idolator of piscinæ. But this is not capable of rational demonstration. Wordsworth, like Coleridge, began life as a heretic, and as the shrewd Pope unfallaciously said, 'once a heretic, always a heretic.' Sound men are sound from the first; safe men are safe from the beginning, and Wordsworth began wrong. His real reason for going to live in the mountains was certainly in part sacred, but it was not in the least Tractarian:—

> 'For he with many feelings, many thoughts,
> Made up a meditative joy, and found
> Religious meanings in the forms of nature.'

His whole soul was absorbed in the one idea, the one feeling, the one thought of the sacredness of hills.

'Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
All things responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite;
There littleness was not.
* * * * *
'He sate, and e'en in their fixed lineaments
Or from the power of a peculiar eye,
Or by creative feeling overborne,
Or by predominance of thought oppressed,
E'en in their fixed lineaments
He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,
Expression ever varying!
* * * * *
'A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.'

The defect of this religion is, that it is too abstract for the practical, and too bare for the musing. What active men require is personality; the meditative require beauty. But Wordsworth gives us neither. The worship of sensuous beauty—the southern religion—is of all sentiments the one most deficient in his writings. His poetry hardly even gives the charm, the entire charm, of the scenery in which he lived. The lighter parts are little noticed: the rugged parts protrude. The bare waste, the folding hill, the rough lake, Helvellyn with a brooding mist, Ulswater in a grey day, these are his subjects. He took a personal interest in the corners of the universe. There is a print of Rembrandt said to represent a piece of the Campagna, a mere waste, with a stump and a man, and under

is written 'Tacet et loquitur;' and thousands will pass the old print-shop where it hangs, and yet have a taste for paintings, and colours, and oils: but some fanciful students, some lonely stragglers, some long-haired enthusiasts, by chance will come, one by one, and look, and look, and be hardly able to take their eyes from the fascination, so massive is the shade, so still the conception, so firm the execution. Thus is it with Wordsworth and his poetry. *Tacet et loquitur.* Fashion apart, the million won't read it. Why should they?—they could not understand it,—don't put them out,—let them buy, and sell, and die,—but idle students, and enthusiastic wanderers, and solitary thinkers, will read, and read, and read, while their lives and their occupations hold. In truth, his works are the Scriptures of the intellectual life; for that same searching, and finding, and penetrating power which the real Scripture exercises on those engaged, as are the mass of men, in practical occupations and domestic ties, do his works exercise on the meditative, the solitary, and the young.

> 'His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.'

And he had more than others,

> 'That blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lightened: that serene and blessed mood
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;
> While with an eye, made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.'

And therefore he has had a whole host of sacred imitators. Mr. Keble, for example, has translated him for women. He has himself told us that he owed to Wordsworth the tendency *ad sanctiora*, which is the mark of his own writings; and in

fact he has but adapted the tone and habit of reverence, which his master applied to common objects and the course of the seasons, to sacred objects and the course of the ecclesiastical year,—diffusing a mist of sentiment and devotion altogether delicious to a gentle and timid devotee. Hartley Coleridge is another translator. He has applied to the sensuous beauties and seductive parts of external nature the same *cultus* which Wordsworth applied to the bare and the abstract. It is—

> 'That fair beauty which no eye can see,
> Of that sweet music which no ear can measure.'

It is, as it were, female beauty in wood and water; it is Rydal Water on a shining day; it is the gloss of the world with the knowledge that it is gloss: the sense of beauty, as in some women, with the feeling that yet it is hardly theirs:—

> 'The vale of Tempe had in vain been fair,
> Green Ida never deemed the nurse of Jove,
> Each fabled stream, beneath its covert grove,
> Had idly murmured to the idle air;
> The shaggy wolf had kept his horrid lair
> In Delphi's cell and old Trophonius' cave,
> And the wild wailing of the Ionian wave
> Had never blended with the sweet despair
> Of Sappho's death-song,—if the sight inspired
> Saw only what the visual organs show;
> If heaven-born phantasy no more required
> Than what within the sphere of sense may grow.
> The beauty to perceive of earthly things,
> The mounting soul must heavenward prune her wings.

And he knew it himself; he has sketched the essence of his works:—

> 'Whither is gone the wisdom and the power,
> That ancient sages scattered with the notes
> Of thought-suggesting lyres? The music floats
> In the void air; e'en at this breathing hour,
> In every cell and every blooming bower,
> The sweetness of old lays is lingering still;
> But the strong soul, the self-constraining will,
> The rugged root that bare the winsome flower,

Is weak and withered. Were we like the Fays
That sweetly nestle in the fox-glove bells,
Or lurk and murmur in the rose-lipped shells,
Which Neptune to the earth for quit-rent pays;
Then might our pretty modern Philomels
Sustain our spirits with their roundelays.'

We had more to say of Hartley: we were to show that his Prometheus was defective; that its style had no Greek severity, no defined outline; that he was a critic as well as a poet, though in a small detached way, and, what is odd enough, that he could criticise in rhyme. We were to make plain how his heart was in the right place, how his love affairs were hopeless, how he was misled by his friends; but our time is done and our space is full, and these topics must 'go without day' of returning. We may end as we began. There are some that are bold and strong and incessant and energetic and hard, and to these is the world's glory; and some are timid and meek and impotent and cowardly and rejected and obscure. 'One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike.' And so of Hartley, whom few regarded; he had a resource, the stillness of thought, the gentleness of musing, the peace of nature.

'To his side the fallow deer
Came and rested without fear;
The eagle, lord of land and sea,
Stooped down to pay him fealty;
And both the undying fish that swim,
In Bowscale-tarn did wait on him;
The pair were servants of his eye,
In their immortality;
And glancing, gleaming, dark or bright,
Moved to and fro for his delight.
He knew the rocks which Angels haunt
Upon the mountains visitant.
He hath kenned them taking wing,
And into caves where Fairies sing
He hath entered; and been told
By voices how men lived of old.
Among the heavens his eye can see
The face of thing that is to be,
And if that men report him right

His tongue could whisper words of might.
—Now another day is come,
Fitter hope and nobler doom,
He hath thrown aside his crook,
And hath buried deep his book.'

'And now the streams may sing for others' pleasure,
The hills sleep on in their eternity.'

He is gone from among them.

Percy Bysshe Shelley*
(1856)

After the long biography of Moore, it is half a comfort to think of a poet as to whom our information is but scanty. The few intimates of Shelley seem inclined to go to their graves without telling in accurate detail the curious circumstances of his life. We are left to be content with vague 'prefaces' and the circumstantial details of a remarkable blunderer. We know something, however;—we know enough to check our inferences from his writings; in some moods it is pleasant not to have them disturbed by long volumes of memoirs and anecdotes.

One peculiarity of Shelley's writing makes it natural that at times we should not care to have, that at times we should wish for, a full biography. No writer has left so clear an image of himself in his writings; when we remember them as a whole, we seem to want no more. No writer, on the other hand, has left so many little allusions which we should be glad to have explained, which the patient patriarch would not perhaps have endured that anyone should comprehend while he did not. The reason is, that Shelley has combined the use of the two great modes by which writers leave with their readers the image of themselves. There is the art of self-delineation. Some authors try in imagination to get outside themselves—to contemplate their character as a fact, and to describe it and the movement of their own actions as external forms and images. Scarcely any one has done this as often as Shelley. There is hardly one of his longer works which does not contain a

* *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1853.
Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and Fragments. By Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley. 1854.
The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Captain Thomas Medwin. 1847.

finished picture of himself in some point or under some circumstances. Again, some writers, almost or quite unconsciously, by a special instinct of style, give an idea of themselves. This is not peculiar to literary men; it is quite as remarkable among men of action. There are people in the world who cannot write the commonest letter on the commonest affair of business without giving a just idea of themselves. The Duke of Wellington is an example which at once occurs of this. You may read a dispatch of his about bullocks and horseshoe-nails; and yet you will feel an interest—a great interest, because somehow among the words seems to lurk the mind of a great general. Shelley has this peculiarity also. Every line of his has a personal impress, an unconscious inimitable manner. And the two modes in which he gives an idea of himself concur. In every delineation we see the same simple intense being. As mythology found a Naiad in the course of every liquid stream, so through each eager line our fancy sees the same panting image of sculptured purity.

Shelley is probably the most remarkable instance of the pure impulsive character. Some men are born under the law: their whole life is a continued struggle between the lower principles of their nature and the higher. These are what are called men of principle; each of their best actions is a distinct choice between conflicting motives. One propension would bear them here; another there; a third would hold them still: into the midst the living will goes forth in its power, and selects whichever it holds to be best. The habitual supremacy of conscience in such men gives them an idea that they only exert their will when they do right; when they do wrong they seem to 'let their nature go;' they say that 'they are hurried away:' but, in fact, there is commonly an act of will in both cases;—only it is weaker when they act ill, because in passably good men, if the better principles are reasonably strong, they conquer; it is only when very faint that they are vanquished. Yet the case is evidently not always so; sometimes the wrong principle is of itself and of set purpose definitely chosen. The very existence of divided natures is a conflict. This is no new description of human nature. For eighteen hundred years Christendom has been amazed at the description in St. Paul of the law of his members warring against the law of his mind. Expressions most unlike in language, but not dissimilar in

meaning, are to be found in some of the most familiar passages of Aristotle.

In extreme contrast to this is the nature which has no struggle. It is possible to conceive a character in which but one impulse is ever felt—in which the whole being, as with a single breeze, is carried in a single direction. The only exercise of the will in such a being is in aiding and carrying out the dictates of the single propensity. And this is something. There are many of our powers and faculties only in a subordinate degree under the control of the emotions; the intellect itself in many moments requires to be bent to defined attention by compulsion of the will; no mere intensity of desire will thrust it on its tasks. But of what in most men is the characteristic action of the will—namely, self-control—such natures are hardly in want. An ultimate case could be imagined in which they would not need it at all. They have no lower desires to pull down, for they have no higher ones which come into collision with them; the very words 'lower' and 'higher,' involving the contemporaneous action and collision of two impulses, are inapplicable to them; there is no strife; all their soul impels them in a single line. Of course this may be a quality of the highest character: indeed in the highest character it will certainly be found; no one will question that the whole nature of the holiest being tends to what is holy without let, struggle, or strife—it would be impiety to doubt it. Yet this same quality may certainly be found in a lower—a much lower—mind than the highest. A level may be of any elevation; the absence of intestine commotion may arise from a sluggish dulness to eager aspirations; the one impulse which is felt may be any impulse whatever. If the idea were completely exemplified, one would instinctively say, that a being with so single a mind could hardly belong to human nature. Temptation is the mark of our life; we can hardly divest ourselves of the idea that it is indivisible from our character. As it was said of solitude, so it may be said of the sole dominion of a single impulse, 'Whoso is devoted to it would seem to be either a beast or a god.'

Completely realised on earth this idea will never be; but approximations may be found, and one of the closest of those approximations is Shelley. We fancy his mind placed in the light of thought, with pure subtle fancies playing to and fro.

On a sudden an impulse arises; it is alone, and has nothing to contend with; it cramps the intellect, pushes aside the fancies, constrains the nature; it *bolts* forward nto action. Such a character is an extreme puzzle to external observers. From the occasionality of its impulses it will often seem silly; from their singularity, strange; from their intensity, fanatical. It is absurdest in the more trifling matters. There is a legend of Shelley, during an early visit to London, flying along the street, catching sight of a new microscope, buying it in a moment; pawning it the instant afterwards to relieve some one in the same street in distress. The trait may be exaggerated, but it is characteristic. It shows the sudden irruption of his impulses, their abrupt force and curious purity.

The predominant impulse in Shelley from a very early age was ' a passion for reforming mankind.' Mr. Newman has told us in his Letters from the East how much he and his half-missionary associates were annoyed at being called ' young people trying to convert the world.' In a strange land, ignorant of the language, beside a recognised religion, in the midst of an immemorial society, the aim, though in a sense theirs, seemed ridiculous when ascribed to them. Shelley would not have felt this at all. No society, however organised, would have been too strong for him to attack. He would not have paused. The impulse was upon him. He would have been ready to preach that mankind were to be ' free, equal, pure, and wise,'—in favour of ' justice, and truth, and time, and the world's natural sphere,'—in the Ottoman Empire, or to the Czar, or to George III. Such truths were independent of time and place and circumstance; some time or other, something, or somebody (his faith was a little vague), would most certainly intervene to establish them. It was this placid undoubting confidence which irritated the positive and sceptical mind of Hazlitt. ' The author of the " Prometheus Unbound," ' he tells us, ' has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. He is sanguine-complexioned and shrill-voiced. As is often observable in the case of religious enthusiasts, there is a slenderness of constitutional stamina, which renders the flesh no match for the spirit. His bending, flexible form appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

"And in its liquid texture mortal wound
Receives no more than can the fluid air."

The shock of accident, the weight of authority, make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit; but it is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in "seas of pearl and clouds of amber." There is no *caput mortuum* of worn-out threadbare experience to serve as ballast to his mind; it is all volatile, intellectual salt-of-tartar, that refuses to combine its evanescent, inflammable essence with anything solid or anything lasting. Bubbles are to him the only realities: —touch them, and they vanish. Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind; and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling.' And so on with vituperation. No two characters could, indeed, be found more oppositet han the open, eager, buoyant poet, and the dark, threatening, unbelieving critic.

It is difficult to say how far such a tendency under some circumstances might not have carried Shelley into positions most alien to an essential benevolence. It is most dangerous to be possessed with an idea. Dr. Arnold used to say that he had studied the life of Robespierre with the greatest personal benefit. No personal purity is a protection against insatiable zeal; it almost acts in the opposite direction. The less a man is conscious of inferior motives, the more likely is he to fancy that he is doing God service. There is no difficulty in imagining Shelley cast by the accident of fortune into the Paris of the Revolution; hurried on by its ideas, undoubting in its hopes, wild with its excitement, going forth in the name of freedom conquering and to conquer;—and who can think that he would have been scrupulous how he attained such an end? It was in him to have walked towards it over seas of blood. One could almost identify him with St. Just, the 'fair-haired republican.'

On another and a more generally interesting topic, Shelley advanced a theory which amounts to a deification of impulse. 'Love,' he tells us, 'is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness. Love withers under constraint: its very

essence is liberty; it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear; it is there most pure, perfect and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve. . . . . A husband and wife ought to continue united only so long as they love each other. Any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration. How odious an usurpation of the right of private judgment should that law be considered, which should make the ties of friendship indissoluble, in spite of the caprices, the inconstancy, the fallibility, of the human mind! And by so much would the fetters of love be heavier and more unendurable than those of friendship, as love is more vehement and capricious, more dependent on those delicate peculiarities of imagination, and less capable of reduction to the ostensible merits of the object.' This passage, no doubt, is from an early and crude essay, one of the notes to 'Queen Mab;' and there are many indications, in his latter years, that though he might hold in theory that 'constancy has nothing virtuous in itself,' yet in practice he shrank from breaking a tie hallowed by years of fidelity and sympathy. But, though his conduct was doubtless higher than his creed, there is no evidence that his creed was ever changed. The whole tone of his works is on the other side. The 'Epipsychidion' could not have been written by a man who attached a moral value to constancy of *mind*. And the whole doctrine is most expressive of his character. A quivering sensibility endured only the essence of the most refined love. It is intelligible, that one who bowed in a moment to every desire should have attached a kind of consecration to the most pure and eager of human passions.

The evidence of Shelley's poems confirms this impression of him. The characters which he delineates have all this same kind of pure impulse. The reforming impulse is especially felt. In almost every one of his works there is some character, of whom all we know is, that he or she had this passionate disposition to reform mankind. We know nothing else about them, and they are all the same. Laon, in the 'Revolt of Islam,' does not differ at all from Lionel, in 'Rosalind and Helen.' Laon differs from Cythna, in the former poem, only as male from female. Lionel is delineated, though not with Shelley's greatest felicity, in a single passage:—

'Yet through those dungeon-walls there came
Thy thrilling light, O liberty!
And as the meteor's midnight flame
Startles the dreamer, sunlight truth
Flashed on his visionary youth,
And filled him, not with love, but faith,
And hope, and courage, mute in death;
For love and life in him were twins,
Born at one birth: in every other
First life, then love its course begins,
Though they be children of one mother:
And so through this dark world they fleet
Divided, till in death they meet.
But he loved all things ever. Then
He passed amid the strife of men,
And stood at the throne of armed power
Pleading for a world of woe:
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro.
'Mid the passions wild of human-kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them;
For, it was said, his words could bind
Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But is revenge, and fear, and pride.
Joyous he was, and hope and peace
On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As, where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver.'

Such is the description of all his reformers in calm. In times of excitement, they all burst forth—

'Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever,
Or the priests of the bloody faith;
They stand on the brink of that mighty river
Whose waves they have tainted with death;
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams, and rages, and swells:

And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks in the surge of eternity.'

In his more didactic poems it is the same. All the world is evil, and will be evil, until some unknown conqueror shall appear—a teacher by rhapsody and a conqueror by words—who shall at once reform all evil. Mathematicians place great reliance on the unknown symbol, great X. Shelley did more; he expected it would take life and reform our race. Such impersonations are, of course, not real men; they are mere incarnations of a desire. Another passion, which no man has ever felt more strongly than Shelley—the desire to penetrate the mysteries of existence (by Hazlitt profanely called curiosity) —is depicted in 'Alastor' as the sole passion of the only person in the poem:—

'By solemn vision and bright silver dream
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips; and all of great,
Or good, or lovely, which the sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
And knew. When early youth had past, he left
His cold fire-side and alienated home
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.
Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness
Has lured his fearless steps; and he has bought
With his sweet voice and eyes, from savage men,
His rest and food.'

He is cheered on his way by a beautiful dream, and the search to find it again mingles with the shadowy quest. It is remarkable how great is the superiority of the personification in 'Alastor,' though one of his earliest writings, over the reforming abstractions of his other works. The reason is, its far greater closeness to reality. The one is a description of what he was; the other of what he desired to be. Shelley had nothing of the magic influence, the large insight, the bold strength, the permeating eloquence, which fit a man for a practical reformer: but he had, in perhaps an unequalled and

unfortunate measure, the famine of the intellect—the daily insatiable craving after the highest truth which is the passion of 'Alastor.' So completely did he feel it, that the introductory lines of the poem almost seem to identify him with the hero; at least they express sentiments which would have been exactly dramatic in his mouth:—

> 'Mother of this unfathomable world!
> Favour my solemn song; for I have loved
> Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps records of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are. In lone and silent hours,
> When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness;
> Like an inspired and desperate alchymist,
> Staking his very life on some dark hope,
> Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks
> With my most innocent love; until strange tears,
> Uniting with those breathless kisses, made
> Such magic as compels the charmed night
> To render up thy charge . . . . and though ne'er yet
> Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,
> Enough from incommunicable dream,
> And twilight phantasms and deep noonday thought,
> Has shone within me, that serenely now,
> And moveless as a long-forgotten lyre,
> Suspended in the solitary dome
> Of some mysterious and deserted fane,
> I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
> May modulate with murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forests and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
> Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.'

The accompaniments are fanciful; but the essential passion was his own.

These two forms of abstract personification exhaust all which can be considered characters among Shelley's poems—one poem excepted. Of course, all his works contain 'Spirits.' 'Phantasms,' 'Dream No. 1,' and 'Fairy No. 3;' but these do not belong to this world. The higher air seems never to have been favourable to the production of marked character; with almost all poets the inhabitants of it are prone to a shadowy thinness: in Shelley, the habit of frequenting mountain-tops has reduced them to evanescent mists of lyrical energy. One poem of Shelley's, however, has two beings of another order; creations which, if not absolutely dramatic characters of the first class—not beings whom we know better than we know ourselves—are nevertheless very high specimens of the second; persons who seem like vivid recollections from our intimate experience. In this case the dramatic execution is so good, that it is difficult to say why the results are not quite of the first rank. One reason of this is, perhaps, their extreme simplicity. Our imaginations, warned by consciousness and outward experience of the wonderful complexity of human nature, refuse to credit the existence of beings, all whose actions are unmodified consequences of a single principle. These two characters are Beatrice Cenci and her father Count Cenci. In most of Shelley's poems—he died under thirty—there is an extreme suspicion of aged persons. In actual life he had plainly encountered many old gentlemen who had no belief in the complete and philosophical reformation of mankind. There is, indeed, an old hermit in the 'Revolt of Islam' who is praised (Captain Medwin identifies him with a Dr. Some-one who was kind to Shelley at Eton); but in general the old persons in his poems are persons whose authority it is desirable to disprove:—

> 'Old age, with its gray hair
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things
> And icy sneers, is naught.'

The less its influence, he evidently believes, the better. Not unnaturally, therefore, he selected for a tragedy a horrible subject from Italian story, in which an old man, accomplished in this world's learning, renowned for the 'cynic sneer of o'er experienced sin,' is the principal evil agent. The character of Count Cenci is that of a man who of set principle does evil for evil's sake. He loves 'the sight of agony:'

> 'All men delight in sensual luxury;
> All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel,
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain:
> But I delight in nothing else.'

If he regrets his age, it is from the failing ability to do evil:

> 'True, I was happier than I am while yet
> Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;
> While lust was sweeter than revenge: and now
> Invention palls.'

It is this that makes him contemplate the violation of his daughter:

> 'There yet remains a deed to act,
> Whose horror might make sharp an appetite
> More dull than mine.'

Shelley, though an habitual student of Plato—the greatest modern writer who has taken great pleasure in his writings—never seems to have read any treatise of Aristotle; otherwise he would certainly seem to have derived from that great writer the idea of the ἀκόλαστος; yet in reality the idea is as natural to Shelley as any man—more likely to occur to him than to most. Children think that everybody who is bad is very bad. Their simple eager disposition only understands the doing what they wish to do; they do not refine; if they hear of a man doing evil, they think he wishes to do it,—that he has a special impulse to do evil, as they have to do what they do. Something like this was the case with Shelley. His mind, impulsive and childlike, could not imagine the struggling kind of character—either those which struggle with their lower nature and conquer, or those which struggle and are vanquished—either the ἐγκρατής or the ἀκρατής of the old thinker; but he could comprehend that which is in reality far worse than either, the being who wishes to commit sin because it is sin, who is as it were possessed with a demon hurrying him on, hot and passionate, to vice and crime. The innocent child is whirled away by one impulse; the passionate reformer by another; the essential criminal, if such a being be possible, by a third. They are all beings, according to one division, of the same class. An imaginative mind like Shelley's, belonging to the second of these

types, naturally is prone in some moods to embody itself under the forms of the third. It is, as it were, the antithesis to itself.—Equally simple is the other character—that of Beatrice. Even before her violation, by a graphic touch of art, she is described as absorbed, or beginning to be absorbed, in the consciousness of her wrongs;

> ' *Beatrice.* As I have said, speak not to me of love.
> Had you a dispensation, I have not;
> Nor will I leave this home of misery
> Whilst my poor Bernard, and that gentle lady
> To whom I owe life and these virtuous thoughts,
> Must suffer what I still have strength to share.
> Alas, Orsino! all the love that once
> I felt for you is turned to bitter pain.
> Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
> Broke by assuming vows no Pope would loose:
> And yet I love you still, but holily,
> Even as a sister or a spirit might;
> And so I swear a cold fidelity.'

After her violation, her whole being is absorbed by one thought,—how and by what subtle vengeance she can expiate the memory of her shame. These are all the characters in Shelley; an impulsive unity is of the essence of them all.

The same characteristic of Shelley's temperament produced also most marked effects on his speculative opinions. The peculiarity of his creed early brought him into opposition to the world. His education seems to have been principally directed by his father, of whom the only description which has reached us is not favourable. Sir Timothy Shelley, according to Captain Medwin, was an illiterate country gentleman of an extinct race; he had been at Oxford, where he learned nothing, had made the grand tour, from which he brought back ' a smattering of bad French and a bad picture of an eruption at Vesuvius.' He had the air of the old school, and the habit of throwing it off which distinguished that school. Lord Chesterfield himself was not easier on matters of morality. He used to tell his son that he would provide for natural children *ad infinitum,* but would never forgive his making a *mésalliance.* On religion his opinions were very lax. He, indeed, ' required his servants,' we are told, ' to attend church,' and even on rare

occasions, with superhuman virtue, attended himself; but there, as with others of that generation, his religion ended. He doubtless did not feel that any more could be required of him. He was not consciously insincere; but he did not in the least realise the opposition between the religion which he professed and the conduct which he pursued. Such a person was not likely to influence a morbidly sincere imaginative nature in favour of the doctrines of the Church of England. Shelley went from Eton, where he had been singular, to Oxford, where he was more so. He was a fair classical scholar; but his real mind was given to out-of-school knowledge. He had written a novel; he had studied chemistry; when pressed in argument, he used to ask, 'What, then, does Condorcet say upon the subject?' This was not exactly the youth for the University of Oxford in the year 1810. A distinguished pupil of that University once observed to us, 'The use of the University of Oxford is, that no one can over-read themselves there. The appetite for knowledge is repressed. A blight is thrown over the ingenuous mind, &c.' And possibly it may be so; considering how small a space literary knowledge fills in the busy English world, it may not be without its advantages that any mind prone to bookish enthusiasm should be taught by the dryness of its appointed studies, the want of sympathy of its teachers, and a rough contact with average English youth, that studious enthusiasm must be its own reward; that in this country it will meet with little other; that it will not be encouraged in high places. Such discipline may, however, be carried too far. A very enthusiastic mind may possibly by it be turned in upon itself. This was the case with Shelley. When he first came up to Oxford physics were his favourite pursuit. On chemistry, especially, he used to be eloquent. 'The galvanic battery,' said he, 'is a new engine. It has been used hitherto to an insignificant extent: yet it has worked wonders already. What will not an extraordinary combination of troughs of colossal magnitude, a well-arranged system of hundreds of metallic plates, effect?' Nature, however, like the world, discourages a wild enthusiasm. 'His chemical operations seemed to an unskilful observer to promise nothing but disasters. He had blown himself up at Eton. He had inadvertently swallowed some mineral poison which he declared had seriously injured his health, and from the effects of which he should never recover. His hands, his

clothes, his books, and his furniture, were stained and covered by medical acids,' and so on. Disgusted with these and other failures, he abandoned physics for metaphysics. He rushed headlong into the form of philosophy then popular. It is not likely that he ever read Locke; and it is easy to imagine the dismay with which the philosopher would have regarded so 'heady and skittish' a disciple: but he continually invoked Locke as an authority, and was really guided by the French expositions of him then popular. Hume, of course, was not without his influence. With such teachers only to control him, an excitable poet rushed in a moment to materialism, and thence to atheism. Deriving any instruction from the University, was, according to him, absurd; he wished to convert the University. He issued a kind of thesis, stating by way of interrogatory all the difficulties of the subject; called it the 'necessity of atheism,' and sent it to the professors, heads of houses, and several bishops. The theistic belief of his college was equal to the occasion. 'It was a fine spring morning on Lady Day in the year 1811, when,' says a fellow-student, 'I went to Shelley's rooms. He was absent; but before I had collected our books, he rushed in. He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened. "I am expelled." He then explained that he had been summoned before the Master and some of the Fellows; that as he was unable to deny the authorship of the essay, he had been expelled and ordered to quit the college the next morning at latest.' He had wished to be put on his trial more regularly, and stated to the Master that England was 'a free country;' but without effect. He was obliged to leave Oxford: his father was very angry; 'if he had broken the Master's windows, one could have understood it:' but to be expelled for publishing a *book* seemed an error incorrigible, because incomprehensible.

These details at once illustrate Shelley's temperament, and enable us to show that the peculiarity of his opinions arose out of that temperament. He was placed in circumstances which left his eager mind quite free. Of his father we have already spoken: there was no one else to exercise a subduing or guiding influence over him; nor would his mind have naturally been one extremely easy to influence. Through life he followed very much his own bent and his own thoughts. His most intimate associates exercised little control over his belief. He

followed his nature; and that nature was in a singular degree destitute of certain elements which most materially guide ordinary men. It seems most likely that a person prone to isolated impulse will be defective in the sensation of conscience. There is scarcely room for it. When, as in common conflicting characters, the whole nature is daily and hourly in a perpetual struggle, the faculty which decides what elements in that nature are to have the supremacy is daily and hourly appealed to. Passions are contending; life is a discipline; there is a reference every moment to the directory of the discipline—the order-book of the passions. In temperaments not exposed to the ordinary struggle there is no such necessity. Their impulse guides them; they have little temptation; are scarcely under the law; have hardly occasion to consult the statute-book. In consequence, simple and beautiful as such minds often are, they are deficient in the sensation of duty; have no haunting idea of right or wrong; show an easy *abandon* in place of a severe self-scrutiny. At first it might seem that such minds lose little; they are exempted from the consciousness of a code to whose provisions they need little access. But such would be the conclusion only from a superficial view of human nature. The whole of our inmost faith is a series of intuitions; and experience seems to show that the intuitions of conscience are the beginning of that series. Childhood has little which can be called a religion; the shows of this world, the play of its lights and shadows, suffice. It is in the collision of our nature, which occurs in youth, that the first real sensation of faith is felt. Conscience is often then morbidly acute; a flush passes over the youthful mind; the guiding instinct is keen and strong, like the passions with which it contends. At the first struggle of our nature commences our religion. Childhood will utter the words; in early manhood, when we become half-unwilling to utter them, they begin to have a meaning. The result of history is similar. The whole of religion rests on a faith that the universe is solely ruled by an almighty and all-perfect Being. This strengthens with the moral cultivation, and grows with the improvement of mankind. It is the assumed axiom of the creed of Christendom; and all that is really highest in our race may have the degree of its excellence tested by the degree of the belief in it. But experience shows that the belief only grows very gradually. We see at various

times, and now, vast outlying nations in whom the conviction of morality—the consciousness of a law—is but weak; and there the belief in an all-perfect God is half-forgotten, faint, and meagre. It exists as something between a tradition and a speculation; but it does not come forth on the solid earth; it has no place in the business and bosoms of men; it is thrust out of view even when we look upwards by fancied idols and dreams of the stars in their courses. Consider the state of the Jewish, as compared with the better part of the Pagan world of old. On the one side we see civilisation, commerce, the arts, a great excellence in all the exterior of man's life; a sort of morality sound and sensible, placing the good of man in a balanced moderation within and good looks without;—in a combination of considerate good sense, with the *air* of aristocratic, or, as it was said, 'godlike' refinement. We see, in a word, civilisation, and the ethics of civilisation; the first polished, the other elaborated and perfected. But this is all; we do not see faith. We see in some quarters rather a horror of the *curiosus deus* interfering, controlling, watching,—never letting things alone,—disturbing the quiet of the world with punishment and the fear of punishment. The Jewish side of the picture is different. We see a people who have perhaps an inaptitude for independent civilisation, who in secular pursuits have only been assistants and attendants on other nations during the whole history of mankind. These have no equable, beautiful morality like the others; but instead a gnawing, abiding, depressing—one might say, a slavish—ceremonial, excessive sense of law and duty. This nation has faith. By a link not logical, but ethical, this intense, eating, abiding supremacy of conscience is connected with a deep daily sense of a watchful, governing, and jealous God. And from the people of the law arises the gospel. The sense of duty, when awakened, awakens not only the religion of the law, but in the end the other religious intuitions which lie round about it. The faith of Christendom has arisen not from a great people, but from 'the least of all people,'—from the people whose anxious legalism was a noted contrast to the easy, impulsive life of pagan nations. In modern language, conscience is the *converting* intuition,—that which turns men from the world without to that within,—from the things which are seen to the realities which are not seen. In a character like Shelley's,

where this haunting, abiding, oppressive moral feeling is wanting or defective, the religious belief in an Almighty God which springs out of it is likely to be defective likewise.

In Shelley's case this deficiency was aggravated by what may be called the abstract character of his intellect. We have shown that no character except his own, and characters most strictly allied to his own, are delineated in his works. The tendency of his mind was rather to personify isolated qualities or impulses—equality, liberty, revenge, and so on—than to create out of separate parts or passions the single conception of an entire character. This is, properly speaking, the mythological tendency. All early nations show this marked disposition to conceive of separate forces and qualities as a kind of semi-persons; that is, not true actual persons with distinct characters, but beings who guide certain influences, and of whom all we know is that they guide those influences. Shelley evinces a remarkable tendency to deal with mythology in this simple and elementary form. Other poets have breathed into mythology a modern life; have been attracted by those parts which seem to have a religious meaning, and have enlarged that meaning while studying to embody it. With Shelley it is otherwise; the parts of mythology by which he is attracted are the bare parts—the simple stories which Dr. Johnson found so tedious:—

'Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acroceraunian mountains.
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains,
She leapt down the rocks
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams;
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine,
Which slopes to the western gleams;
And gliding and springing,
She went ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The earth seemed to love her,

And heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.
Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook,'
&c., &c.

Arethusa and Alpheus are not characters: they are only the spirits and the stream. When not writing on topics connected with ancient mythology, Shelley shows the same bent. 'The Cloud' and the 'Skylark,' are more like mythology—have more of the impulse by which the populace, if we may so say, of the external world was first fancied into existence—than any other modern poems. There is, indeed, no habit of mind more remote from our solid and matter-of-fact existence; none which was once powerful, of which the present traces are so rare. In truth, Shelley's imagination achieved all it could with the materials before it. The materials for the creative faculty must be provided by the receptive faculty. Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities. The memory of Shelley had no heaped-up 'store of life,' no vast accumulation of familiar characters. His intellect did not tend to the strong grasp of realities; its taste was rather for the subtle refining of theories, the distilling of exquisite abstractions. His imagination personified what his understanding presented to it. It had nothing else to do. He displayed the same tendency of mind—sometimes negatively and sometimes positively—in his professedly religious inquiries. His belief went through three stages—first, materialism, then a sort of Nihilism, then a sort of Platonism. In neither of them is the rule of the universe ascribed to a character: in the first and last it is ascribed to animated abstractions; in the second there is no universe at all. In neither of them is there any strong grasp of fact. The writings of the first period are clearly influenced by, and modelled on, Lucretius. He held the same abstract theory of nature—sometimes of half-personified atoms, moving hither and thither of themselves—at other times of a general pervading spirit of nature, holding the same relation to nature, as a visible object, that Arethusa the goddess bears to Arethusa the stream:

'The magic car moved on.
As they approached their goal
The coursers seemed to gather speed:
The sea no longer was distinguished; earth
Appeared a vast and shadowy sphere:
The sun's unclouded orb
Rolled through the black concave;
Its rays of rapid light
Parted around the chariot's swifter course,
And fell like ocean's feathery spray
Dashed from the boiling surge
Before a vessel's prow.

'The magic car moved on.
Earth's distant orb appeared
The smallest light that twinkles in the heavens:
Whilst round the chariot's way
Innumerable systems rolled,
And countless spheres diffused
An ever-varying glory.
It was a sight of wonder: some
Were horned like the crescent moon;
Some shed a mild and silver beam
Like Hesperus o'er the western sea;
Some dash'd athwart with trains of flame,
Like worlds to death and ruin driven;
Some shone like stars, and, as the chariot passed,
Eclipsed all other light.

'Spirit of Nature! here,
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,—
Here is thy fitting temple.
Yet not the lightest leaf
That quivers to the passing breeze
Is less instinct with thee:
Yet not the meanest worm
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
Less shares thy eternal breath.
Spirit of Nature! thou,
Imperishable as this scene,—
Here is thy fitting temple.'

And he copied not only the opinions of Lucretius, but also his tone. Nothing is more remarkable than that two poets of the first rank should have felt a bounding joy in the possession of opinions which, if true, ought, one would think, to move an excitable nature to the keenest and deepest melancholy. That this life is all; that there is no God, but only atoms and a moulding breath; are singular doctrines to be accepted with joy: they only could have been so accepted by wild minds bursting with imperious energy, knowing of no law, 'wreaking thoughts upon expression' of which they knew neither the meaning nor the result. From this stage Shelley's mind passed to another; but not immediately to one of greater belief. On the contrary, it was the doctrine of Hume which was called in to expel the doctrine of Epicurus. His previous teachers had taught him that there was nothing except matter: the Scotch sceptic met him at that point with the question—Is matter certain? Hume, as is well known, adopted the negative part from the theory of materialism and the theory of immaterialism, but rejected the positive side of both. He held, or professed to hold, that there was no substantial thing, either matter or mind; but only 'sensations and impressions' flying about the universe, inhering in nothing and going nowhere. These, he said, were the only subjects of consciousness; all you felt was your feeling, and all your thought was your thought; the rest was only hypothesis. The notion that there was any '*you*' at all was a theory generally current among mankind, but not, unless proved, to be accepted by the philosopher. This doctrine, though little agreeable to the world in general, has an excellence in the eyes of youthful disputants; it is a doctrine which no one will admit, and which no one can disprove. Shelley accordingly accepted it; indeed it was a better description of his universe than of most people's; his mind was filled with a swarm of ideas, fancies, thoughts, streaming on without his volition, without plan or order. He might be pardoned for fancying that they were all; he could not see the outward world for them; their giddy passage occupied him till he forgot himself. He has put down the theory in its barest form: 'The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life which, though startling to the apprehension, is, in fact, that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess

that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived.' And again: 'The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words, *I, you, they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words, *I*, and *you*, and *they*, are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. It is difficult to find terms adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual philosophy has conducted us. We are on that verge where words abandon us; and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know!' On his wild nerves these speculations produced a great effect. Their thin acuteness excited his intellect; their blank result appalled his imagination. He was obliged to pause in the last fragment of one of his metaphysical papers, 'dizzy from thrilling horror.' In this state of mind he began to study Plato; and it is probable that in the whole library of philosophy there is no writer so suitable to such a reader. A common modern author, believing in mind and matter, he would have put aside at once as loose and popular. He was attracted by a writer who, like himself, in some sense did not believe in either—who supplied him with subtle realities different from either, at once to be extracted by his intellect and to be glorified by his imagination. The theory of Plato, that the all-apparent phenomena were unreal, he believed already; he had a craving to believe in something noble, beautiful, and difficult to understand; he was ready, therefore, to accept the rest of that

theory, and to believe that these passing phenomena were imperfect types and resemblances—imperfect incarnations, so to speak—of certain immovable, eternal, archetypal realities. All his later writings are coloured by that theory, though in some passages the remains of the philosophy of the senses with which he commenced appear in odd proximity to the philosophy of abstractions with which he concluded. There is, perhaps, no allusion in Shelley to the *Phædrus;* but no one can doubt which of Plato's ideas would be most attractive to the nature we have described. The most valuable part of Plato he did not comprehend. There is in Shelley none of that unceasing reference to ethical consciousness and ethical religion which has for centuries placed Plato first among the preparatory pre ceptors of Christianity. The general doctrine is that

> 'The one remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines, earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity,
> Until death tramples it to fragments.'

The particular worship of the poet is paid to that one spirit whose

> 'Plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the heaven's light.'

It is evident that not even in this, the highest form of creed to which he ever clearly attained, is there any such distinct conception of a character as is essential to a real religion. The conception of God is not to be framed out of a single attribute. Shelley has changed the 'idea' of beauty into a spirit, and this probably for the purposes of poetry; he has given it life and animal motion; but he has done no more; the 'spirit' has no will, and no virtue: it is animated, but unholy; alive, but unmoral: it is an object of intense admiration; it is not an object of worship.

We have ascribed this quality of Shelley's writings to an

abstract intellect; and in part, no doubt, correctly. Shelley had, probably by nature, such an intellect; it was self-enclosed, self-absorbed, teeming with singular ideas, remote from character and life; but so involved is human nature, that this tendency to abstraction, which we have spoken of as aggravating the consequences of his simple impulsive temperament, was itself aggravated by that temperament. It is a received opinion in metaphysics, that the idea of personality is identical with the idea of will. A distinguished French writer has accurately expressed this: 'Le pouvoir,' says M. Jouffroy, 'que l'homme a de s'emparer de ses capacités naturelles et de les diriger fait de lui une *personne;* et c'est parce que les *choses* n'exercent pas ce pouvoir en elles-mêmes, qu'elles ne sont que des choses. Telle est la véritable différence qui distingue les choses des personnes. Toutes les natures possibles sont douées de certaines capacités; mais les unes ont reçu par-dessus les autres le privilége de se saisir d'elles-mêmes et de se gouverner: celles-là sont les personnes. Les autres en ont été privées, en sorte qu'elles n'ont point de part à ce qui se fait en elles: celles-là sont les choses. Leurs capacités ne s'en développent pas moins, mais c'est exclusivement selon les lois auxquelles Dieu les a soumises, c'est Dieu qui gouverne en elles; il est la personne des choses, comme l'ouvrier est la personne de la montre. Ici la personne est hors de l'être; dans le sein même des choses, comme dans le sein de la montre, la personne ne se rencontre pas; on ne trouve qu'une série de capacités qui se meuvent aveuglément, sans que la nature qui en est douée sache même ce qu'elles font. Aussi ne peut-on demander compte aux choses de ce qui se fait en elles; il faut s'adresser à Dieu: comme on s'adresse à l'ouvrier et non à la montre, quand la montre va mal.' And if this theory be true—and doubtless it is an approximation to the truth—it is evident that a mind ordinarily moved by simple impulse will have little distinct consciousness of personality. While thrust forward by such impulse, it is a mere instrument. Outward things set it in motion. It goes where they bid; it exerts no will upon them; it is, to speak expressively, a mere conducting thing. When such a mind is free from such impulse, there is even less will; thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, pass before it in a sort of dream. For the time it is a mere perceiving thing. In neither case is there a trace of voluntary

character. If we want a reason for anything, 'il faut s'adresser à Dieu.'

Shelley's political opinions were likewise the effervescence of his peculiar nature. The love of liberty is peculiarly natural to the simple impulsive mind. It feels irritated at the idea of a law; it fancies it does not need it: it really needs it less than other men. Government seems absurd—society an incubus. It has hardly patience to estimate particular institutions: it wants to begin again—to make a *tabula rasa* of all which men have created or devised; for they seem to have been constructed on a false system, for an object it does not understand. On this *tabula rasa* Shelley's abstract imagination proceeded to set up arbitrary monstrosities of 'equality' and 'love,' which never will be realised among the children of men.

Such a mind is clearly driven to self-delineation. Nature, no doubt, in some sense remains to it. A dreamy mind—a mind occupied intensely with its own thoughts—will often have a peculiarly intense apprehension of anything which by the hard collision of the world it has been forced to observe. The scene stands out alone in the memory; is a refreshment from hot thoughts; grows with the distance of years. A mind like Shelley's, deeply susceptible to all things beautiful, has many pictures and images shining in its recollection which it recurs to, and which it is ever striving to delineate. Indeed, in such minds it is rather the picture in their mind which they describe than the original object; the 'ideation,' as some harsh metaphysicians call it, rather than the reality. A certain dream-light is diffused over it; a wavering touch, as of interfering fancy or fading recollection. The landscape has not the hues of the real world; it is modified in the *camera obscura* of the self-enclosed intelligence. Nor can such a mind long endure the cold process of external delineation. Its own hot thoughts rush in; its favourite topic is itself and them. Shelley, indeed, as we observed before, carries this to an extent which no poet probably ever equalled. He described not only his character but his circumstances. We know that this is so in a large number of passages; if his poems were commented on by some one thoroughly familiar with the events of his life, we should doubtless find that it was so in many more. On one strange

and painful scene his fancy was continually dwelling. In a gentle moment we have a dirge—

'The warm sun is failing, the bleak wind is wailing,
The bare boughs are sighing, the pale flowers are dying,
And the year
On the earth her deathbed, in a shroud of leaves, dead
Is lying.
Come, months, come away,
From November to May,
In your saddest array;
Follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And like dim shadows watch by her sepulchre.

'The chill rain is falling, the nipt worm is crawling,
The rivers are swelling, the thunder is knelling;
For the year
The blithe swallows are flown, and the lizards each gone
To his dwelling.
Come, months, come away;
Put on white, black, and gray;
Let your light sisters play—
Ye, follow the bier
Of the dead cold year,
And make her grave green with tear on tear.'

In a frenzied mood he breaks forth into wildness:

'She is still, she is cold
On the bridal couch;
One step to the white deathbed,
And one to the bier,
And one to the charnel—and one, O, where?
The dark arrow fled
In the noon.
Ere the sun through heaven once more has roll'd,
The rats in her heart
Will have made their nest,
And the worms be alive in her golden hair;
While the spirit that guides the sun
Sits throned in his flaming chair,
She shall sleep.'

There is no doubt that these and a hundred other similar passages allude to the death of his first wife; as melancholy a story as ever shivered the nerves of an excitable being. The facts are hardly known to us, but they are something like these: In very early youth Shelley had formed a half-fanciful attachment to a cousin, a Miss Harriet Grove, who is said to have been attractive, and to whom, certainly, his fancy often went back in later and distant years. How deep the feeling was on either side we do not know; she seems to have taken an interest in the hot singular dreams which occupied his mind—except only where her image might intrude—from which one might conjecture that she took unusual interest in him; she even wrote some chapters, or parts of some, in one of his boyish novels, and her parents probably thought the 'Rosicrucian' could be endured, as Shelley was the heir to land and a baronetcy. His expulsion from Oxford altered all this. Doubtless he had always in his family been thought 'a singular young man,' and they had waited in perplexity to see if the oddness would turn to unusual good or unusual evil. His atheistic treatise and its results seemed to show clearly the latter, and all communication with Miss Grove was instantly forbidden him. What she felt on the subject is not told us; probably some theistic and undreaming lover intervened, for she married in a short time. The despair of an excitable poet at being deprived of his mistress at the same moment that he was abandoned by his family, and in a measure by society, may be fancied, though it cannot be known. Captain Medwin observes: 'Shelley, on this trying occasion, had the courage to live, in order that he might labour for one great object—the advancement of the human race, and the amelioration of society; and strengthened himself in a resolution to devote his energies to this ultimate end, being prepared to endure every obloquy, to make every sacrifice for its accomplishment: and would,' such is the Captain's English, 'if necessary, have died in the cause.' It does not appear, however, that disappointed love took solely the very unusual form of philanthropy. By chance, whether with or without leave does not appear, he went to see his second sister, who was at school at a place called Balham Hill, near London; and, while walking in the garden with her, 'a Miss Westbrook passed them.' She was a 'handsome blonde young lady, nearly sixteen;' and Shelley was much struck. He

found out that her name was 'Harriett,'—as he, after his marriage, anxiously expresses it, with two t's. 'Harriett' and he fell in love at once. She had the name of his first love; 'fairer, though yet the same.' After his manner, he wrote to her immediately. He was in the habit of doing this to people who interested him, either in his own or under an assumed name: and once, Captain Medwin says, carried on a long correspondence with Mrs. Hemans, then Miss Browne, under his (the captain's) name; but which he, the deponent, was not permitted to peruse. In Miss Westbrook's case the correspondence had a more serious consequence. Of her character we can only guess a little. She was, we think, an ordinary blooming young lady of sixteen. Shelley was an extraordinary young man of nineteen, rather handsome, very animated, and expressing his admiration a little intensely. He was doubtless much the most aristocratic person she had ever spoken to; for her father was a retired innkeeper, and Shelley had always the air of a man of birth. There is a vision, too, of an elder sister, who made 'Harriett dear' very uncomfortable. On the whole, the result may be guessed. At the end of August 1811, we do not know the precise day, they were married at Gretna Green. Jests may be made on it; but it was no laughing matter in the life of the wife or the husband. Of the lady's disposition and mind we know nothing, except from Shelley; a medium which must, under the circumstances, be thought a distorting one. We should conclude that she was capable of making many people happy, though not of making Shelley happy. There is an ordinance of nature at which men of genius are perpetually fretting, but which does more good than many laws of the universe which they praise: it is, that ordinary women ordinarily prefer ordinary men. 'Genius,' as Hazlitt would have said, 'puts them out.' It is so strange, it does not come into the room as usual; it says 'such things:' once it forgot to brush its hair. The common female mind prefers usual tastes, settled manners, customary conversation, defined and practical pursuits. And it is a great good that it should be so. Nature has no wiser instinct. The average woman can make happy the average man; good health, easy cheerfulness, common charms, suffice. If Miss Westbrook had married an everyday person—a gentleman, suppose, in the tallow line—she would have been happy, and have made him happy. Her mind could have under-

stood his life; her society would have been a gentle relief from unodoriferous pursuits. She had nothing in common with Shelley. His mind was full of eager thoughts, wild dreams, singular aspirations. The most delicate tact would probably have often failed, the nicest sensibility been jarred, the most entire affection erred, in dealing with such a being. A most peculiar character was required, to enter into such a rare union of curious qualities. Some eccentric men of genius have, indeed, felt in the habitual tact and serene nothingness of ordinary women, a kind of trust and calm. They have admired an instinct of the world which they had not—a repose of mind they could not share. But this is commonly in later years. A boy of twenty thinks he knows the world; he is too proud and happy in his own eager and shifting thoughts, to wish to contrast them with repose. The commonplaceness of life goads him: placid society irritates him. Bread is an incumbrance; upholstery tedious: he craves excitement; he wishes to reform mankind. You cannot convince him it is right to sew, in a world so full of sorrow and evil. Shelley was in this state; he hurried to and fro over England, pursuing theories, and absorbed in plans. He was deep in metaphysics; had subtle disproofs of all religion; wrote several poems, which would have been a puzzle to a very clever young lady. There were pecuniary difficulties besides: neither of the families had approved of the match, and neither were inclined to support the household. Altogether, no one can be surprised that in less than three years the hasty union ended in a 'separation by mutual consent.' The wonder is that it lasted so long.—What her conduct was after the separation, is not very clear: there were 'reports' about her at Bath—perhaps a loquacious place. She was not twenty, probably handsome, and not improbably giddy: being quite without evidence, we cannot judge what was rumour and what was truth. Shelley has not left us in similar doubt. After a year or two he travelled abroad with Mary, afterwards the second Mrs. Shelley, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin—names most celebrated in those times, and even now known for their anti-matrimonial speculations. Of their 'six weeks' tour' abroad, in the year 1816, a record remains and should be read by any persons who wish to learn what travelling was in its infancy. It was the year when the Continent was first thrown open to English travellers; and few

probably adopted such singular means of locomotion as Shelley and his companions. First they tried walking, and had a very small ass to carry their portmanteau; then they tried a mule; then a *fiacre*, which drove away from them; afterwards they came to a raft. It was not, however, an unamusing journey. At an ugly and out-of-the-way chateau, near Brunen, Shelley began a novel, to be called 'The Assassins,' which he never finished—probably never continued—after his return; but which still remains, and is one of the most curious and characteristic specimens of his prose style. It was a refreshing intellectual tour; one of the most pleasant rambles of his life. On his return he was met by painful intelligence. His wife had destroyed herself. Of her state of mind we have no evidence. She is said to have been deeply affected by the 'reports' to which we have alluded; but whatever it was, Shelley felt himself greatly to blame. He had been instrumental in first dividing her from her family; had connected himself with her in a wild contract, from which neither could ever be set free; if he had not crossed her path, she might have been happy in her own way and in her own sphere. All this preyed upon his mind, and it is said he became mad; and whether or not his horror and pain went to the length of actual frenzy, they doubtless approached that border-line of suffering excitement which divides the most melancholy form of sanity from the most melancholy form of insanity. In several poems he seems to delineate himself in the guise of a maniac:

'"Of his sad history
I know but this," said Maddalo; "he came
To Venice a dejected man, and fame
Said he was wealthy, or he had been so.
Some thought the loss of fortune wrought him woe;
But he was ever talking in such sort
As you do,—but more sadly: he seemed hurt,
Even as a man with his peculiar wrong,
To hear but of the oppression of the strong,
Or those absurd deceits (I think with you
In some respects, you know) which carry through
The excellent impostors of this earth
When they outface detection. He had worth,
Poor fellow! but a humourist in his way."—

'—" Alas, what drove him mad? "

' " I cannot say:
A lady came with him from France; and when
She left him and returned, he wander'd then
About yon lonely isles of desert sand
Till he grew wild. He had no cash nor land
Remaining:—the police had brought him here—
Some fancy took him, and he would not bear
Removal; so I fitted up for him
Those rooms beside the sea, to please his whim;
And sent him busts, and books, and urns for flowers,
Which had adorned his life in happier hours,
And instruments of music. You may guess,
A stranger could do little more or less
For one so gentle and unfortunate—
And those are his sweet strains, which charm the
weight
From madmen's chains, and make this hell appear
A heaven of sacred silence, hushed to hear."
" Nay, this was kind of you,—he had no claim,
As the world says."

' " None but the very same,
Which I on all mankind, were I, as he,
Fall'n to such deep reverse. His melody
Is interrupted; now we hear the din
Of madmen, shriek on shriek, again begin;
Let us now visit him: after this strain
He ever communes with himself again,
And sees and hears not any."

' Having said
These words, we called the keeper: and he led
To an apartment opening on the sea—
There the poor wretch was sitting mournfully
Near a piano, his pale fingers twined
One with the other; and the ooze and wind
Rushed through an open casement, and did sway
His hair, and starred it with the brackish spray:
His head was leaning on a music book,
And he was muttering; and his lean limbs shook;

His lips were pressed against a folded leaf,
In hue too beautiful for health, and grief
Smiled in their motions as they lay apart,
As one who wrought from his own fervid heart
The eloquence of passion: soon he raised
His sad meek face, and eyes lustrous and glazed,
And spoke,—sometimes as one who wrote and thought
His words might move some heart that heeded not,
If sent to distant lands;—and then as one
Reproaching deeds never to be undone,
With wondering self-compassion; then his speech
Was lost in grief, and then his words came each
Unmodulated and expressionless,—
But that from one jarred accent you might guess
It was despair made them so uniform:
And all the while the loud and gusty storm
Hissed through the window; and we stood behind,
Stealing his accents from the envious wind,
Unseen. I yet remember what he said
Distinctly—such impression his words made.'

And casual illustrations—unconscious metaphors, showing a terrible familiarity—are borrowed from insanity in his subsequent works.

This strange story is in various ways deeply illustrative of his character. It shows how the impulsive temperament, not definitely intending evil, is hurried forward, so to say, *over* actions and crimes which would seem to indicate deep depravity —which would do so in ordinary human nature, but which do not indicate it in anything like the same degree of guilt. Driven by singular passion across a tainted region, it retains no taint; on a sudden it passes through evil, but preserves its purity. So curious is this character, that a record of its actions may read like a libel on its life.

To some the story may also suggest whether Shelley's nature was one of those most adapted for love in its highest form. It is impossible to deny that he loved with a great intensity: yet it was with a certain narrowness, and therefore a certain fitfulness. Possibly a somewhat wider nature, taking hold of other characters at more points,—fascinated as intensely, but more

variously,—stirred as deeply, but through more complicated emotions,—is requisite for the highest and most lasting feeling. Passion, to be enduring, must be many-sided. Eager and narrow emotions urge like the gadfly of the poet: but they pass away; they are single; there is nothing to revive them. Various as human nature must be the passion which absorbs that nature into itself. Shelley's mode of delineating women has a corresponding peculiarity. They are well described; but they are described under only one aspect. Every one of his poems almost has a lady whose arms are white, whose mind is sympathising, and whose soul is beautiful. She has many names—Cythna, Asia, Emily; but these are only external disguises; she is indubitably the same person, for her character never varies. No character can be simpler. She is described as the ideal object of love in its most simple and elemental form; the pure object of the essential passion. She is a being to be loved in a single moment, with eager eyes and gasping breath; but you feel that in that moment you have seen the whole. There is nothing to come to afterwards. The fascination is intense, but uniform. There is not the ever-varying grace, the ever-changing expression of the unchanging charm, that alone can attract for all time the shifting moods of a various and mutable nature.

The works of Shelley lie in a confused state, like the *disjecta membra* of the poet of our boyhood. They are in the strictest sense 'remains.' It is absurd to expect from a man who died at thirty a long work of perfected excellence. All which at so early an age can be expected are fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations. Of these Shelley has written some that are nearly, and one or two perhaps that are quite, perfect. But he has not done more. It would have been better if he had not attempted so much. He would have done well to have heeded Goethe's caution to Eckerman: 'Beware of attempting a large work. If you have a great work in your head, nothing else thrives near it, all other thoughts are repelled, and the pleasantness of life itself is for the time lost. What exertion and expenditure of mental force are required to arrange and round off a great whole; and then what powers, and what a tranquil undisturbed situation in life, to express it with the proper fluency! If you have erred as to the whole, all your toil is lost; and further, if, in treating so extensive a subject, you are not perfectly master of your material in the details, the

whole will be defective, and censure will be incurred.' Shelley did not know this. He was ever labouring at long poems: but he has scarcely left one which, as a whole, is worthy of him; you can point to none and say, This is Shelley. Even had he lived to an age of riper capacity, it may be doubted if a being so discontinuous, so easily hurried to and fro, would have possessed the settled, undeviating self-devotion that are necessary to a long and perfect composition. He had not, like Goethe, the cool shrewdness to watch for inspiration.

His success, as we have said, is in fragments; and the best of those fragments are lyrical. The very same isolation and suddenness of impulse which rendered him unfit for the composition of great works, rendered him peculiarly fit to pour forth on a sudden the intense essence of peculiar feeling 'in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.' Mr. Macaulay has said that the words 'bard' and 'inspiration,' generally so meaningless when applied to modern poets, have a meaning when applied to Shelley. An idea, an emotion grew upon his brain, his breast heaved, his frame shook, his nerves quivered with the 'harmonious madness' of imaginative concentration. 'Poetry,' he himself tells us, 'is not, like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . . . Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it.' In verse, Shelley has compared the skylark to a poet; we

may turn back the description on his own art and his own mind:

'Keen are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

'All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

'What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

* * * * * * * *

'Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower.

'Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aerial hue
Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view.

'Like a rose embower'd
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflower'd,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves.

'Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.'

In most poets unearthly beings are introduced to express peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture; but they are generally failures. Lord Byron tried this kind of composition in 'Manfred,' and the result is an evident failure. In Shelley, such singing solitary beings are almost uniformly successful; while writing, his mind really for the moment was in the state in which theirs is supposed always to be. He loved attenuated ideas and abstracted excitement. In expressing their nature he had but to set free his own.

Human nature is not, however, long equal to this sustained effort of remote excitement. The impulse fails, imagination fades, inspiration dies away. With the skylark it is well:

'With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.'

But in unsoaring human nature languor comes, fatigue palls, melancholy oppresses, melody dies away. The universe is not all blue sky; there is the thick fog and the heavy earth. 'The world,' says Mr. Emerson, 'is mundane.' A creeping sense of weight is part of the most aspiring nature. To the most thrilling rapture succeeds despondency, perhaps pain. To Shelley this was peculiarly natural. His dreams of reform, of a world which was to be, called up the imaginative ecstasy: his soul bounded forward into the future; but it is not possible even to the most abstracted and excited mind to place its happiness in the expected realisation of impossible schemes, and yet not occasionally be uncertain of those schemes. The rigid frame of society, the heavy heap of traditional institutions, the solid slowness of ordinary humanity, depress the aspiring fancy. 'Since our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning.' Occasionally we must think of our fathers. No man can always dream of ever

altering all which is. It is characteristic of Shelley, that at the end of his most rapturous and sanguine lyrics there intrudes the cold consciousness of this world. So with his Grecian dreams:—

> 'A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
> From waves serener far;
> A new Peneus rolls its fountains
> Against the morning star.
> Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
> Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep;
> A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
> Fraught with a later prize;
> Another Orpheus sings again,
> And loves, and weeps, and dies:
> A new Ulysses leaves once more
> Calypso for his native shore.'

But he ends:

> 'O, cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy.
> The world is weary of the past—
> O, might it die or rest at last!'

In many of his poems the failing of the feeling is as beautiful as its short moment of hope and buoyancy.

The excellence of Shelley does not, however, extend equally over the whole domain of lyrical poetry. That species of art may be divided—not perhaps with the accuracy of science, but with enough for the rough purposes of popular criticism—into the human and the abstract. The sphere of the former is of course the actual life, passions, and actions of real men,—such are the war-songs of rude nations especially; in that early age there is no subject for art but natural life and primitive passion. At a later time, when from the deposit of the *débris* of a hundred philosophies, a large number of half-personified abstractions are part of the familiar thoughts and language of all mankind, there are new objects to excite the feelings,—we might even say there are new feelings to be excited; the rough substance of original passion is sublimated and attenuated till

we hardly recognise its identity. Ordinarily and in most minds the emotion loses in this process its intensity or much of it; but this is not universal. In some peculiar minds it is possible to find an almost dizzy intensity of excitement called forth by some fancied abstraction, remote altogether from the eyes and senses of men. The love lyric in its simplest form is probably the most intense expression of primitive passion; yet not in those lyrics where such intensity is the greatest,—in those of Burns, for example,—is the passion so dizzy, bewildering, and bewildered, as in the 'Epipsychidion' of Shelley, the passion of which never came into the real world at all, was only a fiction founded on fact, and was wholly—and even Shelley felt it—inconsistent with the inevitable conditions of ordinary existence. In this point of view, and especially also taking account of his peculiar religious opinions, it is remarkable that Shelley should have taken extreme delight in the Bible as a composition. He is the least biblical of poets. The whole, inevitable, essential conditions of real life—the whole of its plain, natural joys and sorrows—are described in the Jewish literature as they are described nowhere else. Very often they are assumed rather than delineated; and the brief assumption is more effective than the most elaborate description. There is none of the delicate sentiment and enhancing sympathy which a modern writer would think necessary; the inexorable facts are dwelt on with a stern humanity, which recognises human feeling though intent on something above it. Of all modern poets, Wordsworth shares the most in this peculiarity; perhaps he is the only recent one who has it at all. He knew the hills beneath whose shade 'the generations are prepared:'

> 'Much did he see of men,
> Their passions and their feelings: chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart,
> That mid the simple form of rural life
> Exist more simple in their elements,
> And speak a plainer language.'

Shelley has nothing of this. The essential feelings he hoped to change; the eternal facts he struggled to remove. Nothing in human life to him was inevitable or fixed; he fancied he could alter it all. His sphere is the 'unconditioned;' he floats away into an imaginary Elysium or an expected Utopia;

beautiful and excellent, of course, but having nothing in common with the absolute laws of the present world. Even in the description of mere nature the difference may be noted. Wordsworth describes this earth as we know it, with all its peculiarities; where there are moors and hills, where the lichen grows, where the slate-rock juts out. Shelley describes the universe. He rushes away among the stars; this earth is an assortment of imagery, he uses it to deck some unknown planet. He scorns 'the smallest light that twinkles in the heavens.' His theme is the vast, the infinite, the immeasurable. He is not of our home, nor homely; he describes not our world, but that which is common to all worlds—the Platonic idea of a world. Where it can, his genius soars from the concrete and real into the unknown, the indefinite, and the void.

Shelley's success in the abstract lyric would prepare us for expecting that he would fail in attempts at eloquence. The mind which bursts forward of itself into the inane, is not likely to be eminent in the composed adjustments of measured persuasion. A voluntary self-control is necessary to the orator: even when he declaims, he must only let himself go; a keen will must be ready, a wakeful attention at hand, to see that he does not say a word by which his audience will not be touched. The eloquence of 'Queen Mab' is of that unpersuasive kind which is admired in the earliest youth, when things and life are unknown, when all that is intelligible is the sound of words.

Mr. Macaulay, in a passage to which we have referred already, speaks of Shelley as having, more than any other poet, many of the qualities of the great old masters; two of these he has especially. In the first place, his imagination is classical rather than romantic,—we should, perhaps, apologise for using words which have been used so often, but which hardly convey even yet a clear and distinct meaning; yet they seem the best for conveying a distinction of this sort. When we attempt to distinguish the imagination from the fancy, we find that they are often related as a beginning to an ending. On a sudden we do not know how a new image, form, idea, occurs to our minds; sometimes it is borne in upon us with a flash, sometimes we seem unawares to stumble upon it, and find it as if it had long been there: in either case the involuntary, unantici-

pated appearance of this new thought or image is a primitive fact which we cannot analyse or account for. We say it originated in our imagination or creative faculty: but this is a mere expression of the completeness of our ignorance; we could only define the imagination as the faculty which produces such effects; we know nothing of it or its constitution. Again, on this original idea a large number of accessory and auxiliary ideas seem to grow or accumulate insensibly, casually, and without our intentional effort; the bare primitive form attracts a clothing of delicate materials—an adornment not altering its essences, but enhancing its effect. This we call the work of the fancy. An exquisite delicacy in appropriating fitting accessories is as much the characteristic excellence of a fanciful mind, as the possession of large, simple, bold ideas is of an imaginative one. The last is immediate; the first comes minute by minute. The distinction is like what one fancies between sculpture and painting. If we look at a delicate statue—a Venus or Juno—it does not suggest any slow elaborate process by which its expression was chiselled and its limbs refined; it seems a simple fact; we look, and require no account of it; it exists. The greatest painting suggests, not only a creative act, but a decorative process: day by day there was something new; we could watch the tints laid on, the dresses tinged, the perspective growing and growing. There is something statuesque about the imagination; there is the gradual complexity of painting in the most exquisite productions of the fancy. When we speak of this distinction, we seem almost to be speaking of the distinction between ancient and modern literature. The characteristic of the classical literature is the simplicity with which the imagination appears in it; that of modern literature is the profusion with which the most varied adornments of the accessory fancy are thrown and lavished upon it. Perhaps nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the modern treatment of antique subjects. One of the most essentially modern of recent poets has an 'Ode to a Grecian Urn:' it begins—

'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of Silence and Slow Time,
Sylvan historian! who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme;

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?'

No ancient poet would have dreamed of writing thus. There would have been no indistinct shadowy warmth, no breath of surrounding beauty: his delineation would have been cold, distinct, chiselled like the urn itself. The use which such a poet as Keats makes of ancient mythology is exactly similar. He owes his fame to the inexplicable art with which he has breathed a soft tint over the marble forms of gods and goddesses, enhancing their beauty without impairing their chasteness. The kind of imagination is not peculiar to a mythological age. The growth of civilisation, at least in Greece, rather increased than diminished the imaginative bareness of the poetical art. It seems to attain its height in Sophocles. If we examine any of his greater passages, a principal beauty is their reserved simplicity. A modern reader almost necessarily uses them as materials for fancy: we are too used to little circumstance to be able to do without it. Take the passage in which Œdipus contrasts the conduct of his sons with that of his daughters:

ὦ πάντ' ἐκείνῳ τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις
φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς.
ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας
θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες, αἱ δὲ σύννομοι
τἄξω βίου τροφεῖα πορσύνουσ' ἀεί.
σφῷν δ', ὦ τέκν', οὓς μὲν εἰκὸς ἦν πονεῖν τάδε,
κατ' οἶκον οἰκουροῦσιν ὥστε παρθένοι,
σφὼ δ' ἀντ' ἐκείνων τἀμὰ δυστήνου κακὰ
ὑπερπονεῖτον. ἡ μέν ἐξ ὅτου νέας
τροφῆς ἔληξε καὶ κατίσχυσεν δέμας,
ἀεὶ μεθ' ἡμῶν δύσμορος πλανωμένη
γερονταγωγεῖ, πολλὰ μὲν κατ' ἀγρίαν
ὕλην ἄσιτος νηλίπους τ' ἀλωμένη,
πολλοῖσι δ' ὄμβροις ἠλίου τε καύμασι
μοχθοῦσα τλήμων, δεύτερ' ἠγεῖται τὰ τῆς
οἴκοι διαίτης, εἰ πατὴρ τροφὴν ἔχοι.

What a contrast to the ravings of Lear! What a world of detail Shakespeare would have put into the passage! What talk of 'sulphurous and thought-executing fires,' 'simulars of virtue,' 'pent-up guilts,' and 'the thick rotundity of the world!' 'Decorum is the principal thing in Sophocles.' The conception of Œdipus is not

> 'Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,
> With harlocks, hemlock, nettle, and cuckoo-flowers.'

There are no 'idle weeds' among the 'sustaining corn.' The conception of Lear is that of an old gnarled oak, gaunt and quivering in the stormy sky, with old leaves and withered branches tossing in the air, and all the complex growth of a hundred years creaking and nodding to its fall. That of Œdipus is the peak of Teneriffe, as we fancied it in our childhood, by itself and snowy, above among the stormy clouds, heedless of the angry winds and the desolate waves,—single, ascending, and alone. Or, to change the metaphor to one derived from an art where the same qualities of mind have produced kindred effects, ancient poetry is like a Grecian temple, with pure form and rising columns,—created, one fancies, by a single effort of a creative nature: modern literature seems to have sprung from the involved brain of a Gothic architect, and resembles a huge cathedral—the work of the perpetual industry of centuries—complicated and infinite in details; but by their choice and elaboration producing an effect of unity which is not inferior to that of the other, and is heightened by the multiplicity through which it is conveyed. And it is this warmth of circumstance—this profusion of interesting detail—which has caused the name 'romantic' to be perseveringly applied to modern literature.

It is only necessary to open Shelley, to show how essentially classical in its highest efforts his art is. Indeed, although nothing can be further removed from the staple topics of the classical writers than the abstract lyric, yet their treatment is nearly essential to it. We have said its sphere is in what the Germans call the unconditioned—in the unknown, immeasurable, and untrodden. It follows from this that we cannot know much about it. We cannot know detail in tracts we have never visited; the infinite has no form; the immeasurable no outline: that which is common to all worlds

is simple. There is therefore no scope for the accessory fancy. With a single soaring effort imagination may reach her end; if she fail, no fancy can help her; if she succeed, there will be no petty accumulations of insensible circumstance in a region far above all things. Shelley's excellence in the abstract lyric is almost another phrase for the simplicity of his impulsive imagination.—He shows it on other subjects also. We have spoken of his bare treatment of the ancient mythology. It is the same with his treatment of nature. In the description of the celestial regions quoted before—one of the most characteristic passages in his writings—the details are few, the air thin, the lights distinct. We are conscious of an essential difference if we compare the 'Ode to the Nightingale,' in Keats, for instance—such verses as

'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs:
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild,
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves,
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath:
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.'

—with the conclusion of the 'Ode to a Skylark'—

'Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

'Better than all measures
Of delight and sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

'Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.'

We can hear that the poetry of Keats is a rich, composite, voluptuous harmony; that of Shelley a clear single ring of penetrating melody.

Of course, however, this criticism requires limitation. There is an obvious sense in which Shelley is a fanciful, as contra-distinguished from an imaginative poet. These words, being invented for the popular expression of differences which can be remarked without narrow inspection, are apt to mislead us when we apply them to the exact results of a near and critical analysis. Besides the use of the word 'fancy' to denote the power which adorns and amplifies the product of the primitive imagination, we also employ it to denote the weaker exercise of the faculty which itself creates those elementary products. We use the word 'imaginative' only for strong, vast, imposing, interesting conceptions: we use the word 'fanciful' when we have to speak of smaller and weaker creations, which amaze us less at the moment and affect us more slightly afterwards. Of course, metaphysically speaking, it is not likely that there will be found to be any distinction; the faculty which creates the most attractive ideas is doubtless the same as that which creates the less attractive. Common language marks the distinction, because common people are impressed by the contrast between what affects them much and what affects them little; but it is no evidence of the entire difference of the latent agencies. Speech, as usual, refers to sensations, and not to occult causes. Of fancies of this sort Shelley is full: whole poems—as the 'Witch of Atlas'—are composed of nothing else. Living a good deal in, and writing a great deal about, the abstract world, it was inevitable that he should often deal in fine subtleties, affecting very little the

concrete hearts of real men. Many pages of his are, in consequence, nearly unintelligible, even to good critics of common poetry. The air is too rarefied for hardy and healthy lungs: these like, as Lord Bacon expressed it, 'to work upon stuff.' From his habitual choice of slight and airy subjects, Shelley may be called a fanciful, as opposed to an imaginative, poet; from his bare delineations of great objects, his keen expression of distinct impulses, he should be termed an imaginative, rather than a fanciful one.

Some of this odd combination of qualities Shelley doubtless owed to the structure of his senses. By one of those singular results which constantly meet us in metaphysical inquiry, the imagination and fancy are singularly influenced by the bodily sensibility. One might have fancied that the faculty by which the soul soars into the infinite, and sees what it cannot see with the eye of the body, would have been peculiarly independent of that body. But the reverse is the case. Vividness of sensation seems required to awaken, delicacy to define, copiousness to enrich, the visionary faculty. A large experience proves that a being who is blind to this world will be blind to the other; that a coarse expectation of what is not seen will follow from a coarse perception of what is seen. Shelley's sensibility was vivid but peculiar. Hazlitt used to say, 'he had seen him; and did not like his looks.' He had the thin keen excitement of the fanatic student; not the broad, natural, enjoying energy which Hazlitt expected from a poet. The diffused life of genial enjoyment which was common to Scott and to Shakespeare, was quite out of his way. Like Mr. Emerson, he would have wondered they could be content with a 'mean and jocular life.' In consequence, there is no varied imagery from human life in his poetry. He was an abstract student, anxious about deep philosophies; and he had not that settled, contemplative, allotted acquaintance with external nature which is so curious in Milton, the greatest of studious poets. The exact opposite, however, to Shelley, in the nature of his sensibility, is Keats. That great poet used to pepper his tongue, 'to enjoy in all its grandeur the cool flavour of delicious claret.' When you know it, you seem to read it in his poetry. There is the same luxurious sentiment; the same poise on fine sensation. Shelley was the reverse of this; he was a waterdrinker; his verse runs quick and chill, like a pure crystal stream. The sensibility of

Keats was attracted too by the spectacle of the universe; he could not keep his eye from seeing, or his ears from hearing, the glories of it. All the beautiful objects of nature reappear by name in his poetry. The abstract idea of beauty is for ever celebrated in Shelley; it haunted his soul. But it was independent of special things. It was the general surface of beauty which lies upon all things. It was the smile of the universe and the expression of the world; it was not the vision of a land of corn and wine. The nerves of Shelley quivered at the idea of loveliness; but no coarse sensation obtruded particular objects upon him. He was left to himself with books and reflection.

So far, indeed, from Shelley having a peculiar tendency to dwell on and prolong the sensation of pleasure, he has a perverse tendency to draw out into lingering keenness the torture of agony. Of his common recurrence to the dizzy pain of mania we have formerly spoken; but this is not the only pain. The nightshade is commoner in his poems than the daisy. The nerve is ever laid bare; as often as it touches the open air of the real world, it quivers with subtle pain. The high intellectual impulses which animated him are too incorporeal for human nature; they begin in buoyant joy, they end in eager suffering.

In style, said Mr. Wordsworth—in workmanship, we think his expression was—Shelley is one of the best of us. This too, we think, was the second of the peculiarities to which Mr. Macaulay referred when he said that Shelley had, more than any recent poet, some of the qualities of the great old masters. The peculiarity of his style is its intellectuality; and this strikes us the more from its contrast with his impulsiveness. He had something of this in life. Hurried away by sudden desires, as he was in his choice of ends, we are struck with a certain comparative measure and adjustment in his choice of means. So in his writings; over the most intense excitement, the grandest objects, the keenest agony, the most buoyant joy, he throws an air of subtle mind. His language is minutely and acutely searching; at the dizziest height of meaning the keenness of the words is greatest. As in mania, so in his descriptions of it, the acuteness of the mind seems to survive the mind itself. It was from Plato and Sophocles, doubtless, that he gained the last perfection in preserving the accuracy of the

intellect when treating of the objects of the imagination; but in its essence it was a peculiarity of his own nature. As it was the instinct of Byron to give in glaring words the gross phenomena of evident objects, so it was that of Shelley to refine the most inscrutable with the curious nicety of an attenuating metaphysician. In the wildest of ecstasies his self-anatomising intellect is equal to itself.

There is much more which might be said, and which ought to be said, of Shelley; but our limits are reached. We have not attempted a complete criticism; we have only aimed to show how some of the peculiarities of his works and life may be traced to the peculiarity of his nature.

Shakespeare—The Man*
(1853)

The greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name. 'No letter of his writing, no record of his conversation, no character of him drawn with any fulness by a contemporary,' have been extracted by antiquaries from the piles of rubbish which they have sifted. Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. You seem to have known Shakespeare—to have seen Shakespeare—to have been friends with Shakespeare. We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed, not from loose tradition or remote research; not from what someone says someone else said that the poet said, but from data, which are at least undoubted, from the sure testimony of his certain works.

Some extreme sceptics, we know, doubt whether it is possible to deduce anything as to an author's character from his works. Yet surely people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books; and if those books were really written by a man, he must have been a man who could write them; he must have had the thoughts which they express, have acquired the knowledge they contain, have possessed the style in which we read them. The difficulty is a defect of the critics. A person who knows nothing of an author he has read, will not know much of an author whom he has seen.

First of all, it may be said, that Shakespeare's works could only be produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. It is often difficult to make out whether the author of a poetic creation is drawing from fancy, or drawing from experience; but for art on a certain scale, the two

* *Shakespeare et son Temps: Étude Littéraire.* Par M. Guizot. Paris. 1852.

Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Plays from early Manuscript Corrections in a Copy of the Folio, 1632, in the possession of R. Payne Collier, Esq., F.S.A. London. 1853.

must concur. Out of nothing, nothing can be created. Some plastic power is required, however great may be the material. And when such a work as 'Hamlet' or 'Othello,' still more, when both of them and others not unequal have been created by a single mind, it may be fairly said, that not only a great imagination, but a full conversancy with the world was necessary to their production. The whole powers of man under the most favourable circumstances, are not too great for such an effort. We may assume that Shakespeare had a great experience.

To a great experience one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity, it is essential to feel it. Some occasions come to all men; but to many they are of little use, and to some they are none. What, for example, has experience done for the distinguished Frenchman, the name of whose essay is prefixed to this paper. M. Guizot is the same man that he was in 1820, or, we believe as he was in 1814. Take up one of his lectures, published before he was a practical statesman; you will be struck with the width of view, the amplitude and the solidity of the reflections; you will be amazed that a mere literary teacher could produce anything so wise; but take up afterwards an essay published since his fall—and you will be amazed to find no more. Napoleon the First is come and gone—the Bourbons of the old *régime* have come and gone—the Bourbons of the new *régime* have had their turn. M. Guizot has been first minister of a citizen king; he has led a great party; he has pronounced many a great *discours* that was well received by the second elective assembly in the world. But there is no trace of this in his writings. No one would guess from them that their author had ever left the professor's chair. It is the same, we are told, with small matters: when M. Guizot walks the street, he seems to see nothing; the head is thrown back, the eye fixed, and the mouth working. His mind is no doubt at work, but it is not stirred by what is external. Perhaps it is the internal activity of mind that overmasters the perceptive power. Anyhow there might have been an *émeute* in the street and he would not have known it; there have been revolutions in his life and he is scarcely the wiser. Among the most frivolous and fickle of civilised nations he is alone. They pass from the game of war to the game of peace, from the game of science to the game of art, from the game of

liberty to the game of slavery, from the game of slavery to the game of licence; he stands like a schoolmaster in the playground, without sport and without pleasure, firm and sullen, slow and awful.

A man of this sort is a curious mental phenomenon. He appears to get early—perhaps to be born with, a kind of dry schedule or catalogue of the universe; he has a ledger in his head, and has a title to which he can refer any transaction; nothing puzzles him, nothing comes amiss to him, but he is not in the least the wiser for anything. Like the book-keeper, he has his heads of account, and he knows them, but he is no wiser for the particular items. After a busy day, and after a slow day, after a few entries, and after many, his knowledge is exactly the same: take his opinion of Baron Rothschild, he will say, 'Yes, he keeps an account with us;' of Humphrey Brown, 'Yes, we have that account, too.' Just so with the class of minds which we are speaking of, and in greater matters. Very early in life they come to a certain and considerable acquaintance with the world; they learn very quickly all they can learn, and naturally they never, in any way, learn any more. Mr. Pitt is, in this country, the type of the character. Mr. Alison, in a well-known passage, makes it a matter of wonder that he was fit to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer at twenty-three, and it *is* a great wonder. But it is to be remembered that he was no more fit at forty-three. As somebody said, he did not grow, he was cast. Experience taught him nothing, and he did not believe that he had anything to learn. The habit of mind in smaller degrees is not very rare, and might be illustrated without end. Hazlitt tells a story of West, the painter, that is in point: When some one asked him if he had ever been to Greece, he answered, 'No, I have read a descriptive catalogue of the principal objects in that country, and I believe I am as well conversant with them as if I had visited it.' No doubt he *was* just as well conversant, and so would be any *doctrinaire*.

But Shakespeare was not a man of this sort. If he walked down a street, he knew what was in that street. His mind did not form in early life a classified list of all the objects in the universe, and learn no more about the universe ever after. From a certain fine sensibility of nature, it is plain that he took a keen interest not only in the general and coarse outlines

of objects, but in their minutest particulars and gentlest gradations. You may open Shakespeare and find the clearest proofs of this; take the following:—

> 'When last the young Orlando parted from you,
> He left a promise to return again
> Within an hour; and, pacing through the forest,
> Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy,
> Lo, what befel! he threw his eye aside,
> And, mark, what object did present itself!
> Under an oak, whose boughs were moss'd with age,
> And high top bald with dry antiquity,
> A wretched ragged man, o'ergrown with hair,
> Lay sleeping on his back: about his neck
> A green and gilded snake had wreathed itself,
> Who with her head, nimble in threats, approach'd
> The opening of his mouth; but suddenly
> Seeing Orlando, it unlink'd itself,
> And with indented glides did slip away
> Into a bush: under which bush's shade
> A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
> Lay crouching, head on ground, with cat-like watch,
> When that the sleeping man should stir; for 'tis
> The royal disposition of that beast,
> To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead:
> This seen,' &c., &c.

Or the more celebrated description of the hunt:—

> 'And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,
> Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles,
> How he outruns the wind, and with what care
> He cranks and crosses, with a thousand doubles:
> The many musits through the which he goes
> Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.
>
> Sometimes he runs among a flock of sheep,
> To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell,
> And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
> To stop the loud pursuers in their yell;
> And sometime sorteth with a herd of deer;
> Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear:

'For there his smell with others being mingled,
The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
Ceasing their clamorous cry, till they have singled,
With much ado, the cold fault cleanly out;
Then do they spend their mouths: Echo replies,
As if another chase were in the skies.

'By this, poor Wat, far off, upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,
To hearken if his foes pursue him still;
Anon their loud alarums he doth hear;
And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore sick that hears the passing bell.

'Then thou shalt see the dew-bedabbled wretch
Turn and return, indenting with the way;
Each envious briar his weary legs doth scratch,
Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay:
For misery is trodden on by many,
And being low, never relieved by any.'

It is absurd, by the way, to say we know *nothing* about the man who wrote that; we know that he had been after a hare. It is idle to allege that mere imagination would tell him that a hare is apt to run among a flock of sheep, or that its so doing disconcerts the scent of hounds. But no single citation really represents the power of the argument. Set descriptions may be manufactured to order, and it does not follow that even the most accurate or successful of them was really the result of a thorough and habitual knowledge of the object. A man who knows little of Nature, may write one excellent delineation, as a poor man may have one bright guinea. Real opulence consists in having many. What truly indicates excellent knowledge is the habit of constant, sudden, and almost unconscious allusion, which implies familiarity, for it can arise from that alone,—and this very species of incidental, casual, and perpetual reference to 'the mighty world of eye and ear,' is the particular characteristic of Shakespeare.

In this respect Shakespeare had the advantage of one whom, in many points, he much resembled—Sir Walter Scott. For a great poet, the organisation of the latter was very blunt; he had no sense of smell, little sense of taste, almost no ear for

music (he knew a few, perhaps three, Scotch tunes, which he avowed that he had learnt in sixty years, by hard labour and mental association), and not much turn for the minutiæ of nature in any way. The effect of this may be seen in some of the best descriptive passages of his poetry, and we will not deny that it does (although proceeding from a sensuous defect), in a certain degree, add to their popularity. He deals with the main outlines and great points of nature, never attends to any others, and in this respect he suits the comprehension and knowledge of many who know only those essential and considerable outlines. Young people, especially, who like big things are taken with Scott, and bored by Wordsworth, who knew too much. And after all, the two poets are in proper harmony, each with his own scenery. Of all beautiful scenery the Scotch is the roughest and barest, as the English is the most complex and cultivated. What a difference is there between the minute and finished delicacy of Rydal Water and the rough simplicity of Loch Katrine. It is the beauty of civilisation beside the beauty of barbarism. Scott has himself pointed out the effect of this on arts and artists.

'Or see yon weather-beaten hind,
Whose sluggish herds before him wind,
Whose tattered plaid and rugged cheek
His Northern clime and kindred speak;
Through England's laughing meads he goes,
And England's wealth around him flows;
Ask if it would content him well,
At ease in those gay plains to dwell,
Where hedgerows spread a verdant screen,
And spires and forests intervene,
And the neat cottage peeps between?
No, not for these would he exchange
His dark Lochaber's boundless range,
Not for fair Devon's meads forsake
Ben Nevis grey and Garry's lake.

'Thus while I ape the measures wild,
Of tales that charmed me yet a child,
Rude though they be, still, with the chime,
Return the thoughts of early time;
And feelings roused in life's first day,

Glow in the line and prompt the lay.
Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,
Which charmed my fancy's wakening hour.
Though no broad river swept along,
To claim perchance heroic song;
Though sighed no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claimed homage from a shepherd's reed,
Yet was poetic impulse given
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled,
But ever and anon between,
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wallflower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruined wall.

* * * * * * *

'From me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
The classic poet's well-conned task?
Nay, Erskine, nay. On the wild hill
Let the wild heathbell flourish still;
Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
But freely let the woodbine twine,
And leave untrimmed the eglantine.
Nay, my friend, nay. Since oft thy praise
Hath given fresh vigour to my lays,
Since oft thy judgment could refine
My flattened thought or cumbrous line,
Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend.
Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrained, my tale.'

And this is wise, for there is beauty in the North as well as in the South. Only it is to be remembered that the beauty of the Trosachs is the result of but a few elements—say birch and brushwood, rough hills and narrow dells, much heather and many stones—while the beauty of England is one thing in one

district and one in another; is here the combination of one set of qualities, and there the harmony of opposite ones, and is everywhere made up of many details and delicate refinements; all which require an exquisite delicacy of perceptive organisation, a seeing eye, a minutely hearing ear. Scott's is the strong admiration of a rough mind; Shakespeare's, the nice minuteness of a susceptible one.

A perfectly poetic appreciation of nature contains two elements,—a knowledge of facts, and a sensibility to charms. Everybody who may have to speak to some naturalists will be well aware how widely the two may be separated. He will have seen that a man may study butterflies and forget that they are beautiful, or be perfect in the 'Lunar theory' without knowing what most people mean by the moon. Generally such people prefer the stupid parts of nature—worms and Cochin-China fowls. But Shakespeare was not obtuse. The lines—

> 'Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath,'

seem to show that he knew those feelings of youth, to which beauty is more than a religion.

In his mode of delineating natural objects Shakespeare is curiously opposed to Milton. The latter, who was still by temperament, and a schoolmaster by trade, selects a beautiful object, puts it straight out before him and his readers, and accumulates upon it all the learned imagery of a thousand years; Shakespeare glances at it and says something of his own. It is not our intention to say that, as a describer of the external world, Milton is inferior; in *set* description we rather think that he was the better. We only wish to contrast the mode in which the delineation is effected. The one is like an artist who dashes off any number of picturesque sketches at any moment; the other like a man who has lived at Rome, has undergone a thorough training, and by deliberate and conscious effort, after a long study of the best masters, can produce a few great pictures. Milton, accordingly, as has been often remarked, is careful in the choice of his subjects; he knows too well the value of his labour to be very ready to squander it; Shake-

speare, on the contrary, describes anything that comes to hand, for he is prepared for it whatever it may be, and what he paints he paints without effort. Compare any passage from Shakespeare, for example, those quoted before, and the following passage from Milton:—

> 'Southward through Eden went a river large,
> Nor changed his course, but through the shaggy hill
> Passed underneath ingulfed; for God had thrown
> That mountain, as his garden mould, high raised
> Upon the rapid current, which, through veins
> Of porous earth with kindly thirst up-drawn,
> Rose a fresh fountain, and with many a rill
> Watered the garden; thence united fell
> Down the steep glade, and met the nether flood,
> Which from his darksome passage now appears:
> And now, divided into four main streams,
> Runs diverse, wandering many a famous realm
> And country, whereof here needs no account;
> But rather to tell how,—if art could tell,—
> How from that sapphire fount the crispèd brooks,
> Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold,
> With mazy error under pendent shades
> Ran nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
> Flowers worthy of Paradise, which not nice Art
> In beds and curious knots, but Nature boon
> Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain,
> Both where the morning sun first warmly smote
> The open field, and where the unpierced shade
> Imbrowned the noontide bowers. Thus was this place
> A happy rural seat of various view;
> Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm;
> Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,
> Hung amiable,—Hesperian fables true,
> If true, here only,—and of delicious taste:
> Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
> Grazing the tender herb, were interposed:
> Or palmy hillock; or the flowery lap
> Of some irriguous valley spread her store,
> Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose.'

Why, you could draw a map of it. It is *not* 'Nature boon

but 'nice art in beds and curious knots;' it is exactly the old (and excellent) style of artificial gardening, by which any place can be turned into trim hedge-rows, and stiff borders, and comfortable shades; but there are no straight lines in nature or Shakespeare. Perhaps the contrast may be accounted for by the way in which the two poets acquired their knowledge of scenes and scenery. We think we demonstrated before that Shakespeare was a sportsman, but if there be still a sceptic or a dissentient, let him read the following remarks on dogs:—

> 'My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
> So flewed, so sanded; and their heads are hung
> With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
> Crook-kneed and dewlapped like Thessalian bulls;
> Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
> Each under each. A cry more tunable
> Was never holla'd to nor cheered with horn
> In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.'

'Judge when you hear.' It is evident that the man who wrote this was a judge of dogs, was an out-of-door sporting man, full of natural sensibility, not defective in 'daintiness of ear,' and above all things, apt to cast on Nature random, sportive, half-boyish glances, which reveal so much, and bequeath such abiding knowledge. Milton, on the contrary, went out to see nature. He left a narrow cell, and the intense study which was his 'portion in this life,' to take a slow, careful, and reflective walk. In his treatise on education he has given us his notion of the way in which young people should be familiarised with natural objects. 'But,' he remarks, 'to return to our institute; besides these constant exercises at home, there is another opportunity of gaining pleasure from pleasure itself abroad; in those vernal seasons of the year when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against nature, not to go out and see her riches and partake in her rejoicing in heaven and earth. I should not therefore be a persuader to them of studying much in these, after two or three years, that they have well laid their grounds, but to ride out in companies, with prudent and staid guides to all quarters of the land; learning and observing all places of strength, all commodities of building and of soil, for towns and tillage, harbours and ports of trade. Sometimes taking sea as far as our navy,

to learn there also what they can in the practical knowledge of sailing and of sea-fight.' Fancy 'the prudent and staid guides.' What a machinery for making pedants. Perhaps Shakespeare would have known that the conversation would be in this sort: —'I say, Shallow, that mare is going in the knees. She has never been the same since you larked her over the fivebar, while Moleyes was talking clay and agriculture. I do not hate Latin so much, but I hate "argillaceous earth;" and what use is *that* to a fellow in the Guards, *I* should like to know?' Shakespeare had himself this sort of boyish buoyancy. He was not 'one of the staid guides.' We might further illustrate it. Yet this would be tedious enough, and we prefer to go on and show what we mean by an experiencing nature in relation to men and women, just as we have striven to ind cate what it is in relation to horses and hares.

The reason why so few good books are written, is that so few people that can write know anything. In general an author has always lived in a room, has read books, has cultivated science, is acquainted with the style and sentiments of the best authors, but he is out of the way of employing his own eyes and ears. He has nothing to hear and nothing to see. His life is a vacuum. The mental habits of Robert Southey, which about a year ago were so extensively praised in the public journals, is the type of literary existence, just as the praise bestowed on it shows the admiration excited by it among literary people. He wrote poetry (as if anybody could) before breakfast; he read during breakfast. He wrote history until dinner; he corrected proof sheets between dinner and tea; he wrote an essay for the 'Quarterly' afterwards; and after supper by way of relaxation composed the 'Doctor'—a lengthy and elaborate jest. Now what can anyone think of such a life —except how clearly it shows that the habits best fitted for communicating information, formed with the best care, and daily regulated by the best motives, are exactly the habits which are likely to afford a man the least information to communicate. Southey had no events, no experiences. His wife kept house and allowed him pocket-money, just as if he had been a German professor devoted to accents, tobacco, and the dates of Horace's amours. And it is pitiable to think that so meritorious a life was only made endurable by a painful delusion. He thought that day by day, and hour by hour, he was

accumulating stores for the instruction and entertainment of a long posterity. His epics were to be in the hands of all men, and his history of Brazil the 'Herodotus of the South American Republics.' As if his epics were not already dead, and as if the people who now cheat at Valparaiso care a *real* who it was that cheated those before them. Yet it was only by a conviction like this that an industrious and caligraphic man (for such was Robert Southey), who might have earned money as a clerk, worked all his days for half a clerk's wages, at occupation much duller and more laborious. The critic in the 'Vicar of Wakefield' lays down that you should *always* say that the picture would have been better if the painter had taken more pains, but in the case of the practised literary man, you should often enough say that the writings would have been much better if the writer had taken less pains. He says he has devoted his life to the subject—the reply is, 'Then you have taken the best way to prevent your making anything of it.' Instead of reading studiously what Burgersdicius and Ænœsidemus said men were, you should have gone out yourself, and seen (if you can see) what they are.

After all, the original way of writing books may turn out to be the best. The first author, it is plain, could not have taken anything from books, since there were no books for him to copy from; he looked at things for himself. Anyhow the modern system fails, for where are the amusing books from voracious students and habitual writers? Not that we mean exactly to say that an author's hard reading is the cause of his writing that which is hard to read. This would be near the truth, but not quite the truth. The two are concomitant effects of a certain defective nature. Slow men read well, but write ill. The abstracted habit, the want of keen exterior interests, the aloofness of mind from what is next it, all tend to make a man feel an exciting curiosity and interest about remote literary events, the toils of scholastic logicians, and the petty feuds of Argos and Lacedæmon, but they also tend to make a man very unable to explain and elucidate those exploits for the benefit of his fellows. What separates the author from his readers, will make it proportionably difficult for him to explain himself to them. Secluded habits do not tend to eloquence; and the indifferent apathy which is so common in studious persons is exceedingly unfavourable to the liveliness of

narration and illustration which is needed for excellence in even the simpler sorts of writing. Moreover in general it will perhaps be found, that persons devoted to mere literature commonly become devoted to mere idleness. They wish to produce a great work, but they find they cannot. Having relinquished everything to devote themselves to this, they conclude on trial that this is impossible. They wish to write, but nothing occurs to them. Therefore they write nothing, and they do nothing. As has been said, they have nothing to do. Their life has no events, unless they are very poor. With any decent means of subsistence, they have nothing to rouse them from an indolent and musing dream. A merchant must meet his bills or he is civilly dead and uncivilly remembered. But a student may know nothing of time and be too lazy to wind up his watch. In the retired citizen's journal in the *Spectator*, we have the type of this way of spending the time:—Mem. Morning 8 to 9, 'Went into the parlour and tied on my shoe-buckles.' This is the sort of life for which studious men commonly relinquish the pursuits of business and the society of their fellows.

Yet all literary men are not tedious, neither are they all slow. One great example even these most tedious times have luckily given us, to show us what may be done by a really great man even now, the same who before served as an illustration—Sir Walter Scott. In his lifetime people denied he was a poet, but nobody said that he was not 'the best fellow' in Scotland—perhaps that was not much—or that he had not more wise joviality, more living talk, more graphic humour, than any man in Great Britain. 'Wherever we went,' said Mr. Wordsworth, 'we found his name acted as an *open sesame*, and I believe that in the character of the *sheriff's* friends, we might have counted on a hearty welcome under any roof in the border country.' Never neglect to talk to people with whom you are casually thrown, was his precept, and he exemplified the maxim himself. 'I believe,' observes his biographer, 'that Scott has somewhere expressed in print his satisfaction, that amid all the changes of our manners, the ancient freedom of personal intercourse may still be indulged between a master and an *out-of-door* servant; but in truth he kept by the old fashion, even with domestic servants, to an extent which I have hardly ever seen practised by any other gentleman. He conversed with his coachman if he sat by him, as he often did, on the box—with

his footman, if he chanced to be in the rumble. Indeed, he did not confine his humanity to his own people; any steady-going servant of a friend of his was soon considered as a sort of friend too, and was sure to have a kind little colloquy to himself at coming or going.' 'Sir Walter speaks to every man as if he was his blood relation,' was the expressive comment of one of these dependents. It was in this way that he acquired the great knowledge of various kinds of men, which is so clear and conspicuous in his writings; nor could that knowledge have been acquired on easier terms, or in any other way. No man could describe the character of Dandie Dinmont, without having been in Lidderdale. Whatever has been once in a book may be put into a book again; but an original character, taken at first hand from the sheepwalks and from nature, must be seen in order to be known. A man, to be able to describe—indeed, to be able to know various people in life—must be able at sight to comprehend their essential features, to know how they shade one into another, to see how they diversify the common uniformity of civilised life. Nor does this involve simply intellectual or even imaginative pre-requisites, still less will it be facilitated by exquisite senses or subtle fancy. What is wanted is, to be able to appreciate mere clay—which mere mind never will. If you will describe the people,—nay, if you will write for the people, you must be one of the people. You must have led their life, and must wish to lead their life. However strong in any poet may be the higher qualities of abstract thought or conceiving fancy, unless he can actually sympathise with those around him, he can never describe those around him. Any attempt to produce a likeness of what is not really *liked* by the person who is describing it, will end in the creation of what may be correct, but is not living—of what may be artistic, but is likewise artificial.

Perhaps this is the defect of the works of the greatest dramatic genius of recent times—Goethe. His works are too much in the nature of literary studies; the mind is often deeply impressed by them, but one doubts if the author was. He saw them as he saw the houses of Weimar and the plants in the act of metamorphosis. He had a clear perception of their fixed condition and their successive transitions, but he did not really (if we may so speak) comprehend their motive power. So to say, he appreciated their life, but not their liveliness.

Niebuhr, as is well known, compared the most elaborate of Goethe's works—the novel of Wilhelm Meister—to a menagerie of tame animals, meaning thereby, as we believe, to express much the same distinction. He felt that there was a deficiency in mere vigour and rude energy. We have a long train and no engine—a great accumulation of excellent matter, arranged and ordered with masterly skill, but not animated with over-buoyant and unbounded play. And we trace this not to a defect in imaginative power, a defect which it would be a simple absurdity to impute to Goethe, but to the tone of his character and the habits of his mind. He moved hither and thither through life, but he was always a man apart. He mixed with unnumbered kinds of men, with courts and academies, students and women, camps and artists, but everywhere he was with them yet not of them. In every scene he was there, and he made it clear that he was there with a reserve and as a stranger. He went there *to experience*. As a man of universal culture and well skilled in the order and classification of human life, the fact of any one class or order being beyond his reach or comprehension seemed an absurdity, and it was an absurdity. He thought that he was equal to moving in any description of society, and he was equal to it; but then on that exact account he was absorbed in none. There were none of surpassing and immeasurably preponderating captivation. No scene and no subject were to him what Scotland and Scotch nature were to Sir Walter Scott. 'If I did not see the heather once a year, I should die,' said the latter; but Goethe would have lived without it, and it would not have cost him much trouble. In every one of Scott's novels there is always the spirit of the old moss trooper—the flavour of the ancient border; there is the intense sympathy which enters into the most living moments of the most living characters—the lively energy which *becomes* the energy of the most vigorous persons delineated. Marmion was 'written' while he was galloping on horseback. It reads as if it were so.

Now it appears that Shakespeare not only had that various commerce with, and experience of men, which was common both to Goethe and to Scott, but also that he agrees with the latter rather than with the former in the kind and species of that experience. He was not merely with men, but of men; he was not a 'thing apart,' with a clear intuition of what was in those around him; he had in his own nature the germs and

tendencies of the very elements that he described. He knew what was in man, for he felt it in himself. Throughout all his writings you see an amazing sympathy with common people, rather an excessive tendency to dwell on the common features of ordinary lives. You feel that common people could have been cut out of him, but not without his feeling it; for it would have deprived him of a very favourite subject—of a portion of his ideas to which he habitually recurred.

'*Leon.* What would you with me, honest neighbour?

Dog. Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you, that decerns you nearly.

Leon. Brief, I pray you; for you see 'tis a busy time with me.

Dog. Marry, this it is, sir.

Verg. Yes, in truth it is, sir.

Leon. What is it, my good friends?

Dog. Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt, as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

Verg. Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honester than I.

Dog. Comparisons are odorous:—*palabras*, neighbour Verges.

Leon. Neighbours, you are tedious.

Dog. It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but, truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

* * * * *

Leon. I would fain know what you have to say.

Verg. Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

Dog. A good old man, sir; he will be talking; as they say, When the age is in, the wit is out; God help us! it is a world to see!—Well said, i'faith, neighbour Verges:—well, God's a good man; an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind:—An honest soul, i'faith, sir; by my troth he is, as ever broke bread; but God is to be worshipped: All men are not alike; alas, good neighbour!

Leon. Indeed, neighbour, he comes too far short of you.
Dog. Gifts that God gives,'—&c. &c.

'*Stafford.* Ay, sir.
Cade. By her he had two children at one birth.
Staff. That's false.
Cade. Ay, there's the question; but, I say, 'tis true:
The elder of them, being put to nurse,
Was by a beggar-woman stol'n away:
And, ignorant of his birth and parentage,
Became a bricklayer, when he came to age;
His son am I; deny it, if you can.
Dick. Nay, 'tis too true; therefore he shall be king.
Smith. Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house, and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it; therefore, deny it not.'

Shakespeare was too wise not to know that for most of the purposes of human life stupidity is a most valuable element. He had nothing of the impatience which sharp logical narrow minds habitually feel when they come across those who do not apprehend their quick and precise deductions. No doubt he talked to the stupid players, to the stupid door-keeper, to the property man, who considers paste jewels 'very preferable, besides the expense'—talked with the stupid apprentices of stupid Fleet Street, and had much pleasure in ascertaining what was their notion of 'King Lear.' In his comprehensive mind it was enough if every man hitched well into his own place in human life. If every one were logical and literary, how would there be scavengers, or watchmen, or caulkers, or coopers? Narrow minds will be subdued to what they 'work in.' The 'dyer's hand' will not more clearly carry off its tint, nor will what is moulded more precisely indicate the confines of the mould. A patient sympathy, a kindly fellow-feeling for the narrow intelligence necessarily induced by narrow circumstances,—a narrowness which, in some degrees, seems to be inevitable, and is perhaps more serviceable than most things to the wise conduct of life—this, though quick and half-bred minds may despise it, seems to be a necessary constituent in the composition of manifold genius. 'How shall the world be served?' asks the host in Chaucer. We must have cart-horses as well as race-horses, draymen as well as poets. It is no bad thing, after all, to

be a slow man and to have one idea a year. You don't make a figure, perhaps, in argumentative society, which requires a quicker species of thought, but is that the worse?

'*Hol. Via,* Goodman Dull; thou hast spoken no word all this while.

Dull. Nor understood none neither, sir.

Hol. Allons, we will employ thee.

Dull. I'll make one in a dance or so, or I will play on the tabor to the worthies, and let them dance the hay.

Hol. Most dull, honest Dull, to our sport away.'

And such, we believe, was the notion of Shakespeare.

S. T. Coleridge has a nice criticism which bears on this point. He observes that in the narrations of uneducated people in Shakespeare, just as in real life, there is a want of prospectiveness and a superfluous amount of regressiveness. People of this sort are unable to look a long way in front of them and they wander from the right path. They get on too fast with one half, and then the other hopelessly lags. They can tell a story exactly as it is told to them (as an animal can go step by step where it has been before), but they can't calculate its bearings beforehand, or see how it is to be adapted to those to whom they are speaking, nor do they know how much they have thoroughly told and how much they have not. 'I went up the street, then I went down the street; no, first went down and then—but you do not follow me, I go before you, sir.' Thence arise the complex styles usually adopted by persons not used to narration. They tumble into a story and get on as they can. This is scarcely the sort of thing which a man could foresee. Of course a metaphysician can account for it, and like S. T. C., assure you that if he had not observed it, he could have predicted it in a moment; but, nevertheless, it is too refined a conclusion to be made out from known premises by common reasoning. Doubtless there is some reason why negroes have woolly hair (and if you look into a philosophical treatise, you will find that the author could have made out that it would be so, if he had not, by a mysterious misfortune, known from infancy that it was the fact),—still one could never have supposed it oneself. And in the same manner, though the profounder critics may explain in a satisfactory and refined manner, how the confused and undulating style of

narration is peculiarly incident to the mere multitude, yet it is most likely that Shakespeare derived his acquaintance with it from the fact, from actual hearing, and not from what may be the surer, but is the slower process of metaphysical deduction. The best passage to illustrate this is that in which the nurse gives a statement of Juliet's age; but it will not exactly suit our pages. The following of Mrs. Quickly will suffice:—

'Tilly-fally, Sir John, never tell me; your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. I was before Master Tizzick, the Deputy, the other day; and, as he said to me,—it was no longer ago than Wednesday last,—Neighbour Quickly, says he;—Master Dumb, our minister, was by then;—Neighbour Quickly, says he, receive those that are civil; for, saith he, you are in an ill name:—now, he said so, I can tell you whereupon; for, says he, you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed to what guests you receive: Receive, says he, no swaggering companions.—There comes none here;—you would bless you to hear what he said:—no, I'll no swaggerers.'

Now, it is quite impossible that this, any more than the political reasoning on the parentage of Cade, which was cited before, should have been written by one not habitually and sympathisingly conversant with the talk of the illogical classes. Shakespeare felt, if we may say so, the force of the bad reasoning. He did not, like a sharp logician, angrily detect a flaw, and set it down as a fallacy of reference or a fallacy of amphibology. This is not the English way, though Dr. Whately's logic has been published so long (and, as he says himself, must now be deemed to be irrefutable, since no one has ever offered any refutation of it). Yet still people in this country do not like to be committed to distinct premises. They like a Chancellor of the Exchequer to say, 'It has during very many years been maintained by the honourable member for Montrose that two and two make four, and I am free to say, that I think there is a great deal to be said in favour of that opinion, but, without committing her Majesty's Government to that proposition as an abstract sentiment, I will go so far as to assume two and two are not sufficient to make five, which, with the permission of the House, will be a sufficient basis for all the operations which I propose to enter upon during the present year.' We have no doubt Shakespeare reasoned in that

way himself. Like any other Englishman, when he had a clear course before him, he rather liked to shuffle over little hitches in the argument, and on that account he had a great sympathy with those who did so too. He would never have interrupted Mrs. Quickly; he saw that her mind was going to and fro over the subject; he saw that it was coming right, and this was enough for him, and will be also enough of this topic for our readers.

We think we have proved that Shakespeare had an enormous specific acquaintance with the common people; that this can only be obtained by sympathy. It likewise has a further condition.

In spiritedness, the style of Shakespeare is very like to that of Scott. The description of a charge of cavalry in Scott reads, as was said before, as if it was written on horseback. A play by Shakespeare reads as if it were written in a playhouse. The great critics assure you, that a theatrical audience must be kept awake, but Shakespeare knew this of his own knowledge. When you read him you feel a sensation of motion, a conviction that there is something 'up,' a notion that not only is something being talked about, but also that something is being done. We do not imagine that Shakespeare owed this quality to his being a player, but rather that he became a player because he possessed this quality of mind. For after, and notwithstanding everything which has, or may be said against the theatrical profession, it certainly does require from those who pursue it a certain quickness and liveliness of mind. Mimics are commonly an elastic sort of person, and it takes a little levity of disposition to enact even the 'heavy fathers.' If a boy joins a company of strolling players, you may be sure that he is not a 'good boy;' he may be a trifle foolish, or a thought romantic, but certainly he is not slow. And this was in truth the case with Shakespeare. They say, too, that in the beginning he was a first-rate link-boy; and the tradition is affecting, though we fear it is not quite certain. Anyhow you feel about Shakespeare that he could have been a link-boy. In the same way you feel he may have been a player. You are sure at once that he could not have followed any sedentary kind of life. But wheresoever there was anything *acted* in earnest or in jest, by way of mock representation or by way of serious reality, there he found matter for his mind. If anybody could have any

doubt about the liveliness of Shakespeare, let them consider the character of Falstaff. When a man has created *that* without a capacity for laughter, then a blind man may succeed in describing colours. Intense animal spirits are the single sentiment (if they be a sentiment) of the entire character. If most men were to save up all the gaiety of their whole lives, it would come about to the gaiety of one speech in Falstaff. A morose man might have amassed many jokes, might have observed many details of jovial society, might have conceived a Sir John marked by rotundity of body, but could hardly have imagined what we call his rotundity of mind. We mean that the animal spirits of Falstaff give him an easy, vague, diffusive sagacity which is peculiar to him. A morose man, Iago, for example, may know anything, and is apt to know a good deal, but what he knows is generally all in corners. He knows number 1, number 2, number 3, and so on, but there is not anything continuous, or smooth, or fluent in his knowledge. Persons conversant with the works of Hazlitt will know in a minute what we mean. Everything which he observed he seemed to observe from a certain soreness of mind; he looked at people because they offended him; he had the same vivid notion of them that a man has of objects which grate on a wound in his body. But there is nothing at all of this in Falstaff; on the contrary, everything pleases him, and everything is food for a joke. Cheerfulness and prosperity give an easy abounding sagacity of mind which nothing else does give. Prosperous people bound easily over all the surface of things which their lives present to them; very likely they keep to the surface; there are things beneath or above to which they may not penetrate or attain, but what is on any part of the surface, that they know well. 'Lift not the painted veil which those who live call life,' and they do not lift it. What is sublime or awful above, what is 'sightless and drear' beneath,—these they may not dream of. Nor is any one piece or corner of life so well impressed on them as on minds less happily constituted. It is only people who have had a tooth out, that really know the dentist's waiting-room. Yet such people, for the time at least, know nothing but that and their tooth. The easy and sympathising friend who accompanies them knows everything; hints gently at the contents of the *Times*, and would cheer you with Lord Palmerston's replies. So, on a greater scale, the man of painful

experience knows but too well what has hurt him, and where and why, but the happy have a vague and rounded view of the round world, and such was the knowledge of Falstaff.

It is to be observed that these high spirits are not a mere excrescence or superficial point in an experiencing nature; on the contrary, they seem to be essential, if not to its idea or existence, at least to its exercise and employment. How are you to know people without talking to them, but how are you to talk to them without tiring yourself? A common man is exhausted in half an hour; Scott or Shakespeare could have gone on for a whole day. This is, perhaps, peculiarly necessary for a painter of English life. The basis of our national character seems to be a certain energetic humour, which may be found in full vigour in old Chaucer's time, and in great perfection in at least one of the popular writers of this age, and which is, perhaps, most easily described by the name of our greatest painter—Hogarth. It is amusing to see how entirely the efforts of critics and artists fail to naturalise in England any other sort of painting. Their efforts are fruitless; for the people painted are not English people: they may be Italians, or Greeks, or Jews, but it is quite certain that they are foreigners. We should not fancy that modern art ought to resemble the Mediæval. So long as artists attempt the same class of paintings as Raphael, they will not only be inferior to Raphael, but they will never please, as they might please, the English people. What we want is what Hogarth gave us—a representation of ourselves. It may be that we are wrong, that we ought to prefer something of the old world, some scene in Rome or Athens, some tale from Carmel or Jerusalem; but, after all, we do not. These places are, we think, abroad, and had their greatness in former time; we wish a copy of what now exists, and of what we have seen. London we know, and Manchester we know, but where are all these? It is the same with literature, Milton excepted, and even Milton can hardly be called a popular writer: all great English writers describe English people, and in describing them, they give, as they must give, a large comic element; and, speaking generally, this is scarcely possible, except in the case of cheerful and easy-living men. There is, no doubt, a biting satire, like that of Swift, which has for its essence misanthropy. There is the mockery of Voltaire, which is based on intellectual contempt;

but this is not our English humour—it is not that of Shakespeare and Falstaff; ours is the humour of a man who laughs when he speaks, of flowing enjoyment, of an experiencing nature.

Yet it would be a great error if we gave anything like an exclusive prominence to this aspect of Shakespeare. Thus he appeared to those around him—in some degree they knew that he was a cheerful, and humorous, and happy man; but of his higher gift they knew less than we. A great painter of men must (as has been said) have a faculty of conversing, but he must also have a capacity for solitude. There is much of mankind that a man can only learn from himself. Behind every man's external life, which he leads in company, there is another which he leads alone, and which he carries with him apart. We see but one aspect of our neighbour, as we see but one side of the moon; in either case there is also a dark half, which is unknown to us. We all come down to dinner, but each has a room to himself. And if we would study the internal lives of others, it seems essential that we should begin with our own. If we study this our *datum*, if we attain to see and feel how this influences and evolves itself in our social and (so to say) public life, then it is possible that we may find in the lives of others the same or analogous features; and if we do not, then at least we may suspect that those who want them are deficient likewise in the secret agencies which we feel produce them in ourselves. The metaphysicians assert, that people originally picked up the idea of the existence of other people in this way. It is orthodox doctrine that a baby says: 'I have a mouth, mamma has a mouth: therefore I'm the same species as mamma. I have a nose, papa has a nose, therefore papa is the same genus as me.' But whether or not this ingenious idea really does or does not represent the actual process by which we originally obtain an acquaintance with the existence of minds analogous to our own, it gives unquestionably the process by which we obtain our notion of that part of those minds which they never exhibit consciously to others, and which only becomes predominant in secresy and solitude and to themselves. Now, that Shakespeare has this insight into the musing life of man, as well as into his social life, is easy to prove; take, for instance, the following passages:—

'This battle fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light;
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day nor night.
Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea,
Forc'd by the tide to combat with the wind;
Now sways it that way, like the self-same sea
Forc'd to retire by fury of the wind:
Sometime, the flood prevails; and then, the wind:
Now one the better; then, another best;
Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror, nor conquered;
So is the equal poise of this fell war.
Here on this molehill will I sit me down.
To whom God will, there be the victory!
For Margaret my queen, and Clifford too,
Have chid me from the battle; swearing both
They prosper best of all when I am thence.
Would I were dead! if God's good will were so;
For what is in this world but grief and woe?
Oh God! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain:
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run:
How many make the hour full complete,
How many hours bring about the day,
How many days will finish up the year,
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the time:
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece;
So minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years,
Pass'd over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.

Ah, what a life were this! how sweet! how lovely!
Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep,
Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
To kings, that fear their subjects' treachery?
O yes, it doth; a thousand-fold it doth.
And to conclude,—the shepherd's homely curds,
His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,
All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
Is far beyond a prince's delicates,
His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
His body couchèd in a curious bed,
When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.'

'A fool, a fool!—I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool!—a miserable world;—
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and basked him in the sun,
And railed on Lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms,—and yet a motley fool.
"Good-morrow, fool," quoth I: "No, sir," quoth he,
"Call me not fool, till heaven hath sent me fortune:"
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says, very wisely, "It is ten o'clock:
Thus may we see," quoth he, "how the world wags;
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine;
And after an hour more, 'twill be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale." When I did hear
The motley fool thus moral on the time,
My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
That fools should be so deep-contemplative;
And I did laugh, sans intermission,
An hour by his dial.'

No slight versatility of mind and pliancy of fancy could pass at will from scenes such as these to the ward of East-cheap and the society which heard the chimes at midnight. One of the reasons of the rarity of great imaginative works is

that in very few cases is this capacity for musing solitude combined with that of observing mankind. A certain constitutional though latent melancholy is essential to such a nature. This is the exceptional characteristic in Shakespeare. All through his works you feel you are reading the popular author, the successful man; but through them all there is a certain tinge of musing sadness pervading, and, as it were, softening their gaiety. Not a trace can be found of 'eating cares' or narrow and mind-contracting toil, but everywhere there is, in addition to shrewd sagacity and buoyant wisdom, a refining element of chastening sensibility, which prevents sagacity from being rough, and shrewdness from becoming cold. He had an eye for either sort of life:—

> 'Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
> The hart ungallèd play;
> For some must watch and some must sleep,
> Thus runs the world away.'

In another point also Shakespeare, as he was, must be carefully contrasted with the estimate that would be formed of him from such delineations as that of Falstaff, and that was doubtless frequently made by casual though only by casual frequenters of the Mermaid. It has been said that the mind of Shakespeare contained within it the mind of Scott; it remains to be observed that it contained also the mind of Keats. For, beside the delineation of human life, and beside also the delineation of nature, there remains also for the poet a third subject—the delineation of *fancies*. Of course, these, be they what they may, are like to, and were originally borrowed either from man or from nature—from one or from both together. We know but two things in the simple way of direct experience, and whatever else we know must be in some mode or manner compacted out of them. Yet 'books are a substantial world, both pure and good,' and so are fancies too. In all countries men have devised to themselves a whole series of half-divine creations—mythologies Greek and Roman, fairies, angels; beings who may be, for aught we know, but with whom, in the meantime, we can attain to no conversation. The most know of these mythologies are the Greek, and what is, we suppose, the second epoch of the Gothic, the fairies; and it so happens that Shakespeare has dealt with them both and in a remarkable manner. We are not,

indeed, of those critics who profess simple and unqualified admiration for the poem of 'Venus and Adonis.' It seems intrinsically, as we know it from external testimony to have been, a juvenile production, written when Shakespeare's nature might be well expected to be crude and unripened. Power is shown, and power of a remarkable kind; but it is not displayed in a manner that will please or does please the mass of men. In spite of the name of its author, the poem has never been popular —and surely this is sufficient. Nevertheless it is remarkable as a literary exercise, and as a treatment of a singular, though unpleasant subject. The fanciful class of poems differ from others in being laid, so far as the scene goes, in a perfectly unseen world. The type of such productions is Keats's 'Endymion.' We mean that it is the type, not as giving the abstract perfection of this sort of art, but because it shows and embodies both its excellences and defects in a very marked and prominent manner. In that poem there are no passions and no actions, there is no art and no life, but there is beauty, and that is meant to be enough, and to a reader of one-and-twenty it is enough and more. What are exploits or speeches? What is Cæsar or Coriolanus? What is a tragedy like Lear, or a real view of human life in any kind whatever, to people who do not know and do not care what human life is? In early youth it is, perhaps, not true that the passions, taken generally, are particularly violent, or that the imagination is in any remarkable degree powerful; but it is certain that the fancy (which though it be, in the last resort, but a weak stroke of that same faculty, which, when it strikes hard, we call imagination, may yet for this purpose be looked on as distinct) is particularly wakeful, and that the gentler species of passions are more absurd than they are afterwards. And the literature of this period of human life runs naturally away from the real world; away from the less ideal portion of it, from stocks and stones, and aunts and uncles, and rests on mere half-embodied sentiments, which in the hands of great poets assume a kind of semi-personality, and are, to the distinction between things and persons, 'as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.' The 'Sonnets' of Shakespeare belong exactly to the same school of poetry. They are not the sort of verses to take any particular hold upon the mind permanently and for ever, but at a certain period they take too much. For a young man to read in the spring of the

year among green fields and in gentle air, they are the ideal. As first of April poetry they are perfect.

The 'Midsummer Night's Dream' is of another order. If the question were to be decided by 'Venus and Adonis,' in spite of the unmeasured panegyrics of many writers, we should be obliged in equity to hold, that as a poet of mere fancy Shakespeare was much inferior to the late Mr. Keats and even to meaner men. Moreover, we should have been prepared with some refined reasonings to show that it was unlikely that a poet with so much hold on reality, in life and nature, both in solitude and in Society, should have also a similar command over *un*-reality: should possess a command not only of flesh and blood, but of the imaginary entities which the self-inworking fancy brings forth—impalpable conceptions of mere mind: *quædam simulacra miris pallentia modis* thin ideas, which come we know not whence, and are given us we know not why. But, unfortunately for this ingenious, if not profound, suggestion, Shakespeare in fact possessed the very faculty which it tends to prove that he would not possess. He could paint Poins and Falstaff, but he excelled also in fairy legends. He had such

> 'Seething brains;
> Such shaping fantasies as apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.'

As, for example, the idea of Puck, or Queen Mab, of Ariel, or such a passage as the following:—

> '*Puck.* How now, spirit! whither wander you?
> *Fai.* Over hill, over dale,
> Thorough bush, thorough briar,
> Over park, over pale,
> Thorough flood, thorough fire,
> I do wander everywhere,
> Swifter than the moones sphere
> And I serve the fairy queen,
> To dew her orbs upon the green:
> The cowslips tall her pensioners be;
> In their gold coats spots you see;
> Those be rubies, fairy favours,
> In those freckles live their savours:
> I must go seek some dew-drops here,

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits, I'll be gone;
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

Puck. The king doth keep his revels here to-night;
Take heed the queen come not within his sight.
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she, as her attendant, hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling:
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild:
But she, perforce, withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy:
And now they never meet in grove, or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled star-light sheen,
But they do square; that all their elves, for fear,
Creep into acorn cups, and hide them there.

Fai. Either I mistake your shape and making quite
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Good-fellow: are you not he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk; and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?

Puck. Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile,
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab;
And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her wither'd dew-lap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from beneath, down topples she,
And *tailor* cries, and falls into a cough;

And then the whole quire hold their hips, and loffe;
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there.—
But room, Fairy, here comes Oberon.
Fai. And here my mistress:—Would that he were gone!'

Probably he believed in these things. Why not? Everybody else believed in them then. They suit our climate. As the Greek mythology suits the keen Attic sky, the fairies, indistinct and half-defined, suit a land of mild mists and gentle airs. They confuse the 'maidens of the villagery;' they are the paganism of the South of England.

Can it be made out what were Shakespeare's political views? We think it certainly can, and that without difficulty. From the English historical plays, it distinctly appears that he accepted, like everybody then, the Constitution of his country. His lot was not cast in an age of political controversy, nor of reform. What was, was from of old. The Wars of the Roses had made it very evident how much room there was for the evils incident to an hereditary monarchy, for instance, those of a controverted succession, and the evils incident to an aristocracy, as want of public spirit and audacious selfishness, to arise and continue within the realm of England. Yet they had not repelled, and had barely disconcerted our conservative ancestors. They had not become Jacobins; they did not concur—and history, except in Shakespeare, hardly does justice to them—in Jack Cade's notion that the laws should come out of his mouth, or that the commonwealth was to be reformed by interlocutors in this scene.

'*Geo.* I tell thee, Jack Cade, the clothier means to dress the Commonwealth, and turn it, and set a new nap on it.

John. So he had need, for 'tis threadbare. Well, I say it was never a merry world in England since gentlemen came up.

Geo. O miserable age! Virtue is not regarded in handy-craftsmen.

John. The nobility think scorn to go in leather aprons.

Geo. Nay more: the king's council are no good workmen.

John. True; and yet it is said, Labour in thy vocation; which is as much as to say, as let the magistrates be labouring men, and therefore should we be magistrates.

Geo. Thou hast hit it, for there is no better sign of a brave mind than a hard hand.

John. I see them! I see them!'

The English people did see them, and know them, and therefore have rejected them. An audience which, *bonâ fide,* entered into the merit of this scene, would never believe in everybody's suffrage. They would know that there is such a thing as nonsense, and when a man has once attained to that deep conception, you may be sure of him ever after. And though it would be absurd to say that Shakespeare originated this idea, or that the disbelief in simple democracy is owing to his teaching or suggestions, yet it may, nevertheless, be truly said, that he shared in the peculiar knowledge of men—and also possessed the peculiar constitution of mind—which engender this effect. The author of Coriolanus never believed in a mob, and did something towards preventing anybody else from doing so. But this political idea was not exactly the strongest in Shakespeare's mind. We think he had two others stronger, or as strong. First, the feeling of loyalty to the ancient polity of this country—not because it was good, but because it existed. In his time, people no more thought of the origin of the monarchy than they did of the origin of the Mendip Hills. The one had always been there, and so had the other. God (such was the common notion) had made both, and one as much as the other. Everywhere, in that age, the common modes of political speech assumed the existence of certain utterly national institutions, and would have been worthless and nonsensical except on that assumption. This national habit appears as it ought to appear in our national dramatist. A great divine tells us that the Thirty-nine Articles are 'forms of thought;' inevitable conditions of the religious understanding: in politics, 'kings, lords, and commons' are, no doubt, 'forms of thought,' to the great majority of Englishmen; in these they live, and beyond these, they never move. You can't reason on the removal (such is the notion) of the English Channel, nor St. George's Channel, nor can you of the English Constitution in like manner. It is to most of us, and to the happiest of us, a thing immutable, and such, no doubt, it was to Shakespeare, which, if any one would have proved, let him refer at random to any page of the historical English plays.

The second peculiar tenet which we ascribe to his political creed is a disbelief in the middle classes. We fear he had no opinion of traders. In this age, we know, it is held that the keeping of a shop is equivalent to a political education. Occasionally, in country villages, where the trader sells everything, he is thought to know nothing, and has no vote; but in a town where he is a householder (as, indeed, he is in the country), and sells only one thing—there we assume that he knows everything. And this assumption is in the opinion of some observers confirmed by the fact. Sir Walter Scott used to relate, that when, after a trip to London, he returned to Tweedside, he always found the people in that district knew more of politics than the Cabinet. And so it is with the mercantile community in modern times. If you are a Chancellor of the Exchequer, it is possible that you may be acquainted with finance; but if you sell Figs it is certain that you will. Now we nowhere find this laid down in Shakespeare. On the contrary, you will generally find that when a 'citizen' is mentioned, he generally does or says something absurd. Shakespeare had a clear perception that it is possible to bribe a class as well as an individual, and that personal obscurity is but an insecure guarantee for political disinterestedness.

> 'Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
> His private arbours and new-planted orchards
> On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,
> And to your heirs for ever: common pleasures,
> To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.
> Here was a Cæsar! when comes such another?'

He everywhere speaks in praise of a tempered and ordered and qualified polity, in which the pecuniary classes have a certain influence, but no more, and shows in every page a keen sensibility to the large views, and high souled energies, the gentle refinements and disinterested desires in which those classes are likely to be especially deficient. He is particularly the poet of personal nobility, though, throughout his writings, there is a sense of freedom, just as Milton is the poet of freedom, though with an underlying reference to personal nobility; indeed, we might well expect our two poets to combine the appreciation of a rude and generous liberty, with that of a delicate and refined nobleness, since it is the union of these two elements that characterises our society and their experience.

There are two things—good-tempered sense and ill-tempered sense. In our remarks on the character of Falstaff, we hope we have made it very clear that Shakespeare had the former; we think it nearly as certain that he possessed the latter also. An instance of this might be taken from that contempt for the perspicacity of the bourgeoisie which we have just been mentioning. It is within the limits of what may be called malevolent sense, to take extreme and habitual pleasure in remarking the foolish opinions, the narrow notions, and fallacious deductions which seem to cling to the pompous and prosperous man of business. Ask him his opinion of the currency question, and he puts ' bills ' and ' bullion ' together in a sentence, and he does not seem to care what he puts between them. But a more proper instance of (what has an odd sound), the malevolence of Shakespeare is to be found in the play of ' Measure for Measure.' We agree with Hazlitt, that this play seems to be written, perhaps more than any other, *con amore*, and with a relish, and this seems to be the reason why, notwithstanding the unpleasant nature of its plot, and the absence of any very attractive character, it is yet one of the plays which take hold on the mind most easily and most powerfully. Now the entire character of Angelo, which is the expressive feature of the piece, is nothing but a successful embodiment of the pleasure, the malevolent pleasure, which a warm-blooded and expansive man takes in watching the rare, the dangerous and inanimate excesses of the constrained and cold-blooded. One seems to see Shakespeare, with his bright eyes and his large lips and buoyant face, watching with a pleasant excitement the excesses of his thin-lipped and calculating creation, as though they were the excesses of a real person. It is the complete picture of a natural hypocrite, who does not consciously disguise strong impulses, but whose very passions seem of their own accord to have disguised themselves and retreated into the recesses of the character, yet only to recur even more dangerously when their proper period is expired, when the will is cheated into security by their absence, and the world (and, it may be, the ' judicious person ' himself) is impressed with a sure reliance in his chilling and remarkable rectitude.

It has, we believe, been doubted whether Shakespeare was a man much conversant with the intimate society of women. Of

course no one denies that he possessed a great knowledge of them—a capital acquaintance with their excellences, faults, and foibles; but it has been thought that this was the result rather of imagination than of society, of creative fancy rather than of perceptive experience. Now that Shakespeare possessed, among other singular qualities, a remarkable imaginative knowledge of women, is quite certain, for he was acquainted with the soliloquies of women. A woman we suppose, like a man, must be alone, in order to speak a soliloquy. After the greatest possible intimacy and experience, it must still be imagination, or fancy at least, which tells any man what a woman thinks of herself and to herself. There will still—get as near the limits of confidence or observation as you can—be a space which must be filled up from other means. Men can only divine the truth—reserve, indeed, is a part of its charm. Seeing, therefore, that Shakespeare had done what necessarily and certainly must be done without experience, we were in some doubt whether he might not have dispensed with it altogether. A grave reviewer cannot know these things. We thought indeed of reasoning that since the delineations of women in Shakespeare were admitted to be first-rate, it should follow,—at least there was a fair presumption,—that no means or aid had been wanting to their production, and that consequently we ought, in the absence of distinct evidence, to assume that personal intimacy as well as solitary imagination had been concerned in their production. And we meant to cite the 'questions about Octavia,' which Lord Byron, who thought he had the means of knowing, declared to be 'women all over.'

But all doubt was removed and all conjecture set to rest by the coming in of an ably-dressed friend from the external world, who mentioned that the language of Shakespeare's women was essentially female language; that there were certain points and peculiarities in the English of cultivated English women, which made it a language of itself, which must be heard familiarly in order to be known. And he added, 'except a greater use of words of Latin derivation, as was natural in an age when ladies received a learned education, a few words not now proper, a few conceits that were the fashion of the time, and there is the very same English in the women's speeches in Shakespeare.' He quoted—

'Think not I love him, though I ask for him;
'Tis but a peevish boy:—yet he talks well;—
But what care I for words? yet words do well,
When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
It is a pretty youth:—not very pretty:—
But, sure, he's proud; and yet his pride becomes him:
He'll make a proper man: The best thing in him
Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue
Did make offence, his eye did heal it up.
He is not tall; yet for his years he's tall:
His leg is but so so: and yet 'tis well.
There was a pretty redness in his lip;
A little riper and more lusty red
Than that mix'd in his cheek; 'twas just the difference
Betwixt the constant red, and mingled damask.
There be some women, Silvius, had they mark'd him
In parcels as I did, would have gone near
To fall in love with him: but, for my part,
I love him not, nor hate him not; and yet
I have more cause to hate him than to love him:
For what had he to do to chide at me?
He said, my eyes were black, and my hair black,
And, now I am remember'd, scorn'd at me:
I marvel, why I answer'd not again:
But that's all one;'

and the passage of Perdita's cited before about the daffodils that—

'take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath;'

and said that these were conclusive. But we have not, ourselves, heard young ladies converse in that manner.

Perhaps it is in his power of delineating women, that Shakespeare contrasts most strikingly with the greatest master of the art of dialogue in antiquity—we mean Plato. It will, no doubt, be said that the delineation of women did not fall within Plato's plan; that men's life was in that age so separate and predominant that it could be delineated by itself and apart; and no doubt these remarks are very true. But what led Plato to form that plan? What led him to select that

peculiar argumentative aspect of life, in which the masculine element is in so high a degree superior? We believe that he did it because he felt that he could paint that kind of scene much better than he could paint any other. If a person will consider the sort of conversation that was held in the cool summer morning, when Socrates was knocked up early to talk definitions and philosophy with Protagoras, he will feel, not only that women would fancy such dialogues to be certainly stupid, and very possibly to be without meaning, but also that the side of character which is there presented, is one from which not only the feminine but even the epicene element is nearly if not perfectly excluded. It is the intellect surveying and delineating intellectual characteristics. We have a dialogue of thinking faculties; the character of every man is delineated by showing us, not his mode of action or feeling, but his mode of thinking, alone and by itself. The pure mind, purged of all passion and affection, strives to view and describe others in like manner; and the singularity is, that the likenesses so taken are so good, —that the accurate copying of the merely intellectual effects and indications of character gives so true and so firm an impression of the whole character,—that a daguerreotype of the mind should almost seem to be a delineation of the life. But though in the hand of a consummate artist, such a way of representation may in some sense succeed in the case of men, it would certainly seem sure to fail in the case of women. The mere intellect of a woman is a mere nothing. It originates nothing, it transmits nothing, it retains nothing; it has little life of its own, and, therefore, it can hardly be expected to attain any vigour. Of the lofty Platonic world of the ideas, which the soul in the old doctrine was to arrive at by pure and continuous reasoning, women were never expected to know anything. Plato (though Mr. Grote denies that he was a practical man) was much too practical for that; he reserved his teaching for people whose belief was regulated and induced in some measure by abstract investigations; who had an interest in the pure and (as it were) geometrical truth itself; who had an intellectual character (apart from and accessory to their other character) capable of being viewed as a large and substantial existence, Shakespeare's being, like a woman's, worked as a whole. He was capable of intellectual abstractedness, but commonly he was touched with the sense of earth. One thinks of him as firmly

set on our coarse world of common clay, but from it he could paint the moving essence of thoughtful feeling—which is the best refinement of the best women. Imogen or Juliet would have thought little of the conversation of Gorgias.

On few subjects has more nonsense been written than on the learning of Shakespeare. In former times, the established tenet was, that he was acquainted with the entire range of the Greek and Latin classics, and familiarly resorted to Sophocles and Æschylus as guides and models. This creed reposed not so much on any painful or elaborate criticism of Shakespeare's plays, as on one of the *à priori* assumptions permitted to the indolence of the wise old world. It was then considered clear, by all critics, that no one could write good English, who could not also write bad Latin. Questioning scepticism has rejected this axiom, and refuted with contemptuous facility the slight attempt which had been made to verify this case of it from the evidence of the plays themselves. But the new school, not content with showing that Shakespeare was no formed or elaborate scholar, propounded the idea that he was quite ignorant, just as Mr. Croker 'demonstrates' that Napoleon Bonaparte could scarcely write or read. The answer is that Shakespeare wrote his plays, and that those plays show not only a very powerful, but also a very cultivated mind. A hard student Shakespeare was not, yet he was a happy and pleased reader of interesting books. He was a natural reader; when a book was dull, he put it down, when it looked fascinating, he took it up, and the consequence is, that he remembered and mastered what he read. Lively books, read with lively interest, leave strong and living recollections; the instructors, no doubt, say that they ought not to do so, and inculcate the necessity of dry reading. Yet the good sense of a busy public has practically discovered that what is read easily is recollected easily, and what is read with difficulty is remembered with more. It is certain that Shakespeare read the novels of his time, for he has founded on them the stories of his plays; he read Plutarch, for his words still live in the dialogue of the 'proud Roman' plays; and it is remarkable that Montaigne is the only philosopher that Shakespeare can be proved to have read, because he deals more than any other philosopher with the first impressions of things which exist. On the other hand, it may be doubted if Shakespeare would have perused his commentators. Certainly, he

would have never read a page of this review, and we go so far as to doubt whether he would have been pleased with the admirable discourses of M. Guizot, which we ourselves, though ardent admirers of his style and ideas, still find it a little difficult to *read*—and what would he have thought of the following speculations of an anonymous individual, whose notes have been recently published in a fine octavo by Mr. Collier, and, according to the periodical essayists, 'contribute valuable suggestions to the illustration of the immortal bard'?

'THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.
ACT I. SCENE I.

'P. 92. The reading of the subsequent line has hitherto been

"'Tis true; for you are over boots in love;"

but the manuscript corrector of the Folio, 1632, has changed it to

"'Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love,"

which seems more consistent with the course of the dialogue; for Proteus, remarking that Leander had been "more than over shoes in love," with Hero, Valentine answers, that Proteus was even more deeply in love than Leander. Proteus observes of the fable of Hero and Leander—

"That's a deep story of a deeper love,
For he was more than over shoes in love."

Valentine retorts—

"'Tis true; *but* you are over boots in love."

For instead of *but* was perhaps caught by the compositor from the preceding line.'

It is difficult to fancy Shakespeare perusing a volume of such annotations, though we allow that we admire them ourselves. As to the controversy on his school learning, we have only to say, that though the alleged imitations of the Greek tragedians are mere nonsense, yet there is clear evidence that Shakespeare received the ordinary grammar school education of his time, and that he had derived from the pain and suffering of several years, not exactly an acquaintance with Greek or Latin, but like Eton boys a firm conviction that there are such languages.

Another controversy has been raised as to whether Shakespeare was religious. In the old editions it is commonly enough laid down, that, when writing his plays, he had no desire to fil

the Globe Theatre, but that his intentions were of the following description. 'In this play,' Cymbeline, 'Shakespeare has strongly depicted the frailties of our nature, and the effect of vicious passions on the human mind. In the fate of the Queen we behold the worst of perfidy justly sacrificed by the arts she had, with unnatural ambition, prepared for others; and in reviewing her death and that of Cloten, we may easily call to mind the words of Scripture,' &c. And of King Lear it is observed with great confidence, that Shakespeare, '*no doubt*, intended to mark particularly the afflicting character of children's ingratitude to their parents, and the conduct of Goneril and Regan to each other, *especially* in the former's poisoning the latter, and laying hands on *herself*, we are taught that those who want gratitude towards their parents (who gave them their being, fed them, nurtured them to *man's* estate) will not scruple to commit more barbarous crimes, and easily to forget that, by destroying their body, they destroy their soul also.' And Dr. Ulrici, a very learned and illegible writer, has discovered that in every one of his plays Shakespeare had in view the inculcation of the peculiar sentiments and doctrines of the Christian religion, and considers the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' to be a specimen of the lay or amateur sermon. This is what Dr. Ulrici thinks of Shakespeare; but what would Shakespeare have thought of Dr. Ulrici? We believe that '*Via* goodman Dull,' is nearly the remark which the learned professor would have received from the poet to whom his very careful treatise is devoted. And yet, without prying into the Teutonic mysteries, a gentleman of missionary aptitudes might be tempted to remark, that in many points Shakespeare is qualified to administer a rebuke to people of the prevalent religion. Meeting a certain religionist is like striking the corner of a wall. He is possessed of a firm and rigid persuasion that you must leave off this and that, stop, cry, be anxious, be advised, and, above all things, refrain from doing what you like, for nothing is so bad for any one as that. And in quite another quarter of the religious hemisphere, we occasionally encounter gentlemen, who have most likely studied at the feet of Dr. Ulrici, or at least of an equivalent Gamaliel, and who, when we, or such as we, speaking the language of mortality, remark of a pleasing friend, 'Nice fellow, so and so! Good fellow as ever lived!' reply sternly, upon an unsuspecting reviewer, with—

'Sir, is he an *earnest* man?' To which, in some cases, we are unable to return a sufficient answer. Yet Shakespeare, differing, in that respect at least, from the disciples of Carlyle, had, we suspect, an objection to grim people, and we fear would have liked the society of Mercutio better than that of a dreary divine, and preferred Ophelia or '*that* Juliet' to a female philanthropist of sinewy aspect. And, seriously, if this world is not all evil, he who has understood and painted it best must probably have some good. If the underlying and almighty essence of this world be good, then it is likely that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence, will be himself good. There is a religion of week-days as well as of Sundays, of 'cakes and ale' as well as of pews and altar cloths. This England lay before Shakespeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its motley society, and its long history, and its bold exploits, and its gathering power; and he saw that they were good. To him, perhaps, more than to any one else, has it been given to see, that they were a great unity, a great religious object; that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principles of its noble vigour, to the essence of character, to what we know of Hamlet, and seem to fancy of Ophelia, we might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand the nature which God has made. Let us, then, think of him, not as a teacher of dry dogmas, or a sayer of hard sayings, but as

> 'A priest to us all,
> Of the wonder and bloom of the world'—

a teacher of the hearts of men and women; one from whom may be learned something of that inmost principle that ever modulates

> 'With murmurs of the air,
> And motions of the forests and the sea,
> And voice of living beings, and woven hymns
> Of night and day and the deep heart of man.'

We must pause, lest our readers reject us, as the Bishop of Durham the poor curate, because he was 'mystical and confused.'

Yet it must be allowed that Shakespeare was worldly, and the proof of it is, that he succeeded in the world. Possibly

this is the point on which we are most richly indebted to tradition. We see generally indeed in Shakespeare's works the popular author, the successful dramatist; there is a life and play in his writings rarely to be found, except in those who have had habitual good luck, and who, by the tact of experience feel the minds of their readers at every word, like a good rider feels the mouth of his horse. But it would have been difficult quite to make out whether the profits so accruing had been profitably invested—whether the genius to create such illusions was accompanied with the care and judgment necessary to put out their proceeds properly in actual life. We could only have said, that there was a general impression of entire calmness and equability in his principal works, rarely to be found where there is much pain, which usually makes gaps in the work and dislocates the balance of the mind. But happily here, and here almost alone, we are on sure historical ground. The reverential nature of Englishmen has carefully preserved what they thought the great excellence of their poet—that he made a fortune.* It is certain that Shakespeare was proprietor of the Globe Theatre—that he made money there, and invested the same in land at Stratford-on-Avon, and probably no circumstance in his life ever gave him so much pleasure. It was a great thing that he, the son of the wool-comber, the poacher, the good-for-nothing, the vagabond (for so we fear the phrase went in Shakespeare's youth), should return upon the old scene a substantial man, a person of capital, a freeholder, a gentleman to be respected, and over whom even a burgess could not affect the least superiority. The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do. Why did Mr. Disraeli take the duties of the Exchequer with so much relish? Because people said he was a novelist; an *ad captandum* man, and, *monstrum horrendum!* a Jew, that could not add up. No doubt it pleased

* The only antiquarian thing which can be fairly called an anecdote of Shakespeare is, that Mrs. Alleyne, a shrewd woman in those times, and married to Mr. Alleyne, the founder of Dulwich Hospital, was one day, in the absence of her husband, applied to on some matter by a player who gave a reference to Mr. Hemmings (the 'notorious' Mr. Hemmings, the commentators say) and to Mr. Shakespeare of the Globe, and that the latter, when referred to, said, 'Yes, certainly, he knew him, and he was a rascal and good-for-nothing.' The proper speech of a substantial man, such as it is worth while to give a reference to.

his inmost soul to do the work of the red-tape people better than those who could do nothing else. And so with Shakespeare: it pleased him to be respected by those whom he had respected with boyish reverence, but who had rejected the imaginative man—on their own ground and in their own subject, by the only title which they would regard—in a word, as a monied man. We seem to see him eying the burgesses with good-humoured fellowship and genial (though suppressed and half-unconscious) contempt, drawing out their old stories, and acquiescing in their foolish notions, with everything in his head and easy sayings upon his tongue,—a full mind and a deep dark eye, that played upon an easy scene—now in fanciful solitude, now, in cheerful society; now occupied with deep thoughts, now and equally so, with trivial recreations, forgetting the dramatist in the man of substance, and the poet in the happy companion; beloved and even respected, with a hope for every one, and a smile for all.

We have now done. We know that we have made little of a great subject, but we have done our best; and as for our not having said anything new or original, we know that this is unnecessary, for if we only printed unanticipated speculations, how small would be the size of this periodical,* and at what large intervals would it not come forth among mankind.

*The prospective Review.

John Milton*
(1859)

THE 'Life of Milton,' by Professor Masson, is a difficulty for the critics. It is very laborious, very learned, and in the main, we believe, very accurate. It is exceedingly long,—there are 780 pages in this volume, and there are to be two volumes more: it touches on very many subjects, and each of these has been investigated to the very best of the author's ability. No one can wish to speak with censure of a book on which so much genuine labour has been expended; and yet we are bound, as true critics, to say that we think it has been composed upon a principle that is utterly erroneous. In justice to ourselves we must explain our meaning.

There are two methods on which biography may consistently be written. The first of these is what we may call the exhaustive method. Every fact which is known about the hero may be told us; every thing which he did, every thing which he would not do, every thing which other people did to him, every thing which other people would not do to him,—may be narrated at full length. We may have a complete picture of all the events of his life; of all which he underwent, and all which he achieved. We may, as Mr. Carlyle expresses it, have a complete account 'of his effect upon the universe, and of the effect of the universe upon him.' We admit that biographies of this species would be very long and generally very tedious, we know that the world could not contain very many of them;

**The Life of John Milton, narrated in connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his time.* By David Masson, M.A., Professor of English Literature in University College, London. Cambridge: Macmillan.

An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton. By Thomas Keightley; with an Introduction to *Paradise Lost.* London: Chapman and Hall.

The Poems of Milton, with notes by Thomas Keightley. London: Chapman and Hall.

but nevertheless the principle on which they may be written is intelligible.

The second method on which the life of a man may be written is the selective. Instead of telling everything, we may choose what we will tell. We may select out of the numberless events, from among the innumerable actions of his life, those events and those actions which exemplify his true character, which prove to us what were the true limits of his talents, what was the degree of his deficiencies, which were his defects, which his vices,—in a word, we may select the traits and the particulars which seem to give us the best idea of the man as he lived and as he was. On this side the flood, as Sydney Smith would have said, we should have fancied that this was the only practicable principle on which biographies can be written about persons of whom many details are recorded. For ancient heroes the exhaustive method is possible. All that can be known of them is contained in a few short passages of Greek and Latin, and it is quite possible to say whatever can be said about every one of these: the result would not be unreasonably bulky, though it might be dull. But in the case of men who have lived in the thick of the crowded modern world, no such course is admissible; overmuch *may* be said, and we must choose what we will say. Biographers, however, are rarely bold enough to adopt the selective method consistently. They have, we suspect, the fear of the critics before their eyes. They do not like that it should be said that 'the work of the learned gentleman contains serious omissions: the events of 1562 are not mentioned; those of October 1579 are narrated but very cursorily:' and we fear that in any case such remarks will be made. Very learned people are pleased to show that they know what is *not* in the book; sometimes they may hint that perhaps the author did not know it, or surely he would have mentioned it. But a biographer who wishes to write what most people of cultivation will be pleased to read must be courageous enough to face the pain of such censures. He must choose, as we have explained, the characteristic parts of his subject; and all that he has to take care of besides, is so to narrate them that their characteristic elements shall be shown: to give such an account of the general career as may make it clear what these chosen events really were; to show their respective bearings to one another; to delineate what is expressive in such a manner as to make it expressive.

This plan of biography is, however, by no means that of Mr. Masson. He has no dread of overgrown bulk and overwhelming copiousness. He finds, indeed, what we have called the exhaustive method insufficient. He not only wishes to narrate in full the life of Milton, but to add those of his contemporaries likewise: he seems to wish to tell us not only what Milton did, but also what every one else did in Great Britain during his lifetime. He intends his book to be not 'merely a biography of Milton, but also in some sort a continuous history of his time. . . . The suggestions of Milton's life have indeed determined the tracks of these historical researches and expositions, sometimes through the literature of the period, sometimes through its civil and ecclesiastical politics; but the extent to which I have pursued them, and the space which I have assigned to them, have been determined by my desire to present, by their combination, something like a connected historical view of British thought and British society in general prior to the Revolution.' We need not do more than observe that this union of heterogeneous aims must always end, as it has in this case, in the production of a work at once overgrown and incomplete. A great deal which has only a slight bearing on the character of Milton is inserted; much that is necessary to a true history of 'British thought and British society' is of necessity left out. The period of Milton's life which is included in the published volume makes the absurdity especially apparent. In middle life Milton was a great controversialist on contemporary topics; and though it would not be proper for a biographer to load his pages with a full account of all such controversies, yet some notice of the most characteristic of them would be expected from him. In this part of Milton's life some reference to public events would be necessary; and we should not severely censure a biographer, if the great interest of those events induced him to stray a little from his topic. But the first thirty years of Milton's life require a very different treatment. He passed those years in the ordinary musings of a studious and meditative youth; it was the period of 'Lycidas' and of 'Comus;' he then dreamed the

> 'Sights which youthful poets dream
> On summer eve by haunted stream.'

We do not wish to have this part of his life disturbed, to a

greater extent than may be necessary, with the harshness of public affairs. Nor is it necessary that it should be so disturbed. A life of poetic retirement requires but little reference to anything except itself. In a biography of Mr. Tennyson we should not expect to hear of the Reform Bill, or the Corn Laws. Mr. Masson is, however, of a different opinion. He thinks it necessary to tell us, not only all which Milton did, but every thing also that he might have heard of.

The biography of Mr. Keightley is on a very different scale. He tells the story of Milton's career in about half a small volume. Probably this is a little too concise, and the narrative is somewhat dry and bare. It is often, however, acute, and is always clear; and even were its defects greater than they are, we should think it unseemly to criticise the last work of one who has performed so many useful services to literature with extreme severity.

And we must observe, that in one respect Mr. Keightley contrasts very favourably with Mr. Masson: he only tells his readers what he knows did happen; Mr. Masson is fond of telling us what he thinks may have happened. We have some such passages as the following:

'Look back, reader, and see him as I do! Now, under the elms of his father's lawn, he listens to the rural hum, and marks the branches as they wave, and the birds as they fly; now, in the garden, he notes the annual series of the plants and the daily blooming of the roses. In his walks in the neighbourhood, also, he observes not only the wayside vegetation, but the whole wide face of the landscape, rich in wood and meadow, to the royal towers of Windsor and the boundary line of the low Surrey hills. Over this landscape, changing its livery from day to day, fall the varying seasons. Light green spring comes with its showers and its days of keener blue, when Nature is warm at the root, and all things gain in liveliness; spring changes into summer, when all is one wealth of leafage, and the gorgeous bloom of the orchard passes into the forming fruit, summer deepens into autumn, gathering the tanned haycocks and tumbling the golden grain; and, at last, when the brown and yellow leaves have fallen and the winds have blown them and the rains rotted them, comes winter with his biting breath, and the fields are either all white, so that the most familiar eye

hardly knows them, or they lie in mire, and in the dull brumous air, the stripped stems and netted twig-work of the trees are like a painting in China ink. And these seasons have each their occupations. Now the plough is afield; now the sower casts his seed; now the sheep are shorn; now the mower whets his scythe. There is, moreover, the quicker continual alternation of night and day, dipping the landscape in darkness or in lunar tints and bringing it back again, as Aurora rises, in all the colours of the morn. In summer the twilight steals slowly over the lawn, and, seated at the open window, the poet, who has heard the lark's carol abroad by day, will listen in the stillness for the first song of the nightingale; and when the night is farther advanced, may there not be a walk on the lawn, to observe the trembling tops of the poplars, and to drink, ere the soul is done with that day more, the solemnising glory of the tranquil stars? Look on, then, glorious youth, at stars and trees, at the beauties of day, and the beauties of night, at the changing aspects of the seasons, and at all that the seasons bring!'

Perhaps this is what Mr. Punch would call 'Moonshine,' and Mr. Masson 'lunar tints.' Such fanciful eloquence is teasing to the reader. If we are to have fancies, we like to have our own. At least, if our own are disturbed, we wish them to be replaced by others which are better. Mr. Masson has neither the humour of imagination, nor the delicacy of style, which in other hands have made these hypotheses pleasing. Mr. Carlyle is almost our only master of delineative conjecture.

The bare outline of Milton's life is very well known. We have all heard that he was born in the later years of King James, just when Puritanism was collecting its strength for the approaching struggle; that his father and mother were quite good people, inclined, but not immoderately, to that persuasion; that he went up to Cambridge early, and had some kind of dissension with the authorities there; that the course of his youth was in a singular degree pure and staid; that in boyhood he was a devourer of books, and that he early became, and always remained, a severely studious man; that he married, and had difficulties of a peculiar character with his first wife; that he wrote on Divorce; that after the death of his first wife, he married a second time a lady who died very soon, and a third time a person who survived him more than fifty years; that he wrote early

poems of singular beauty, which we still read; that he travelled in Italy, and exhibited his learning in the academies there; that he plunged deep in the theological and political controversies of his time; that he kept a school, or rather, in our more modern phrase, took pupils; that he was a republican of a peculiar kind, and of 'no church,' which Dr. Johnson thought dangerous; that he was Secretary for Foreign Languages under the Long Parliament, and retained that office after the coup-d'état of Cromwell; that he defended the death of Charles the First, and became blind from writing a book in haste upon that subject; that after the Restoration he was naturally in a position of some danger and much difficulty; that in the midst of that difficulty he wrote 'Paradise Lost;' that he did not fail in heart or hope, but lived for fourteen years after the destruction of all for which he had laboured, in serene retirement, 'though fallen on evil days, though fallen on evil times;'—all this we have heard from our boyhood. How much is wanting to complete the picture—how many traits, both noble and painful, might be recovered from the past—we shall never know, till some biographer skilled in interpreting the details of human nature shall select this subject for his art.

All that we can hope to do in an essay like this is, to throw together some miscellaneous remarks on the character of the Puritan poet, and on the peculiarities of his works; and if in any part of them we may seem to make unusual criticisms, and to be over-ready with depreciation or objection, our excuse must be that we wish to paint a likeness, and that the harsher features of the subject should have a prominence, even in an outline.

There are two kinds of goodness conspicuous in the world, and often made the subject of contrast there; for which, however, we seem to want exact words, and which we are obliged to describe rather vaguely and incompletely. These characters may in one aspect be called the sensuous and the ascetic. The character of the first is that which is almost personified in the poet-king of Israel, whose actions and whose history have been 'improved' so often by various writers, that it now seems trite even to allude to them. Nevertheless, the particular virtues and the particular career of David seem to embody the idea of what may be called sensuous goodness far more completely than a living being in general comes near to an abstract idea. There may have been shades in the actual man which would have

modified the resemblance; but in the portrait which has been handed down to us, the traits are perfect and the approximation exact. The principle of this character is its sensibility to outward stimulus; it is moved by all which occurs, stirred by all which happens, open to the influences of whatever it sees, hears, or meets with. The certain consequence of this mental constitution is a peculiar liability to temptation. Men are, according to the divine, 'put upon their trial through the senses.' It is through the constant suggestions of the outer world that our minds are stimulated, that our will has the chance of a choice, that moral life becomes possible. The sensibility to this external stimulus brings with it, when men have it to excess, an unusual access of moral difficulty. Everything acts on them, and everything has a chance of turning them aside; the most tempting things act upon them very deeply, and their influence, in consequence, is extreme. Naturally, therefore, the errors of such men are great. We need not point the moral—

> 'Dizzied faith and guilt and woe,
> Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
> Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
> Sated power's tyrannic mood,
> Counsels shared with men of blood,
> Sad success, parental tears,
> And a dreary gift of years.'

But, on the other hand, the excellence of such men has a charm, a kind of sensuous sweetness, that is its own. Being conscious of frailty, they are tender to the imperfect; being sensitive to this world, they sympathise with the world; being familiar with all the moral incidents of life, their goodness has a richness and a complication: they fascinate their own age, and in their deaths they are 'not divided' from the love of others. Their peculiar sensibility gives a depth to their religion; it is at once deeper and more human than that of other men. As their sympathetic knowledge of those whom they have seen is great, so it is with their knowledge of Him whom they have not seen; and as is their knowledge, so is their love; it is deep, from their nature; rich and intimate, from the variety of their experience; chastened by the ever-present sense of their weakness and of its consequences.

In extreme opposition to this is the ascetic species of goodness. This is not, as is sometimes believed, a self-produced

ideal—a simply voluntary result of discipline and restraint. Some men have by nature what others have to elaborate by effort. Some men have a repulsion from the world. All of us have, in some degree, a protective instinct; an impulse, that is to say, to start back from what may trouble us, to shun what may fascinate us, to avoid what may tempt us. On the moral side of human nature this preventive check is occasionally imperious; it holds the whole man under its control,—makes him recoil from the world, be offended at its amusements, be repelled by its occupations, be scared by its sins. The consequences of this tendency, when it is thus in excess, upon the character are very great and very singular. It secludes a man in a sort of natural monastery; he lives in a kind of moral solitude; and the effects of his isolation for good and for evil on his disposition are very many. The best result is a singular capacity for meditative religion. Being aloof from what is earthly, such persons are shut up with what is spiritual; being unstirred by the incidents of time, they are alone with the eternal; rejecting this life, they are alone with what is beyond. According to the measure of their minds, men of this removed and secluded excellence become eminent for a settled and brooding piety, for a strong and predominant religion. In human life too, in a thousand ways, their isolated excellence is apparent. They walk through the whole of it with an abstinence from sense, a zeal of morality, a purity of ideal, which other men have not. Their religion has an imaginative grandeur, and their life something of an unusual impeccability. And these are obviously singular excellences. But the deficiencies to which the same character tends are equally singular. In the first place, their isolation gives them a certain pride in themselves, and an inevitable ignorance of others. They are secluded by their constitutional δαίμων from life; they are repelled from the pursuits which others care for; they are alarmed at the amusements which others enjoy. In consequence, they trust in their own thoughts; they come to magnify both them and themselves—for being able to think and to retain them. The greater the nature of the man, the greater is this temptation. His thoughts are greater, and, in consequence, the greater is his tendency to prize them, the more extreme is his tendency to overrate them. This pride, too, goes side by side with a want of sympathy. Being aloof from others, such a mind is unlike others and it feels, and sometimes it feels bitterly, its own unlikeness

Generally, however, it is too wrapt up in its own exalted thoughts to be sensible of the pain of moral isolation; it stands apart from others, unknowing and unknown. It is deprived of moral experience in two ways,—it is not tempted itself, and it does not comprehend the temptations of others. And this defect of moral experience is almost certain to produce two effects, one practical and the other speculative. When such a man is wrong, he will be apt to believe that he is right. If his own judgment err, he will not have the habit of checking it by the judgment of others; he will be accustomed to think most men wrong; differing from them would be no proof of error, agreeing with them would rather be a basis for suspicion. He may, too, be very wrong, for the conscience of no man is perfect on all sides. The strangeness of secluded excellence will be sometimes deeply shaded by very strange errors. To be commonly above others, still more to think yourselves above others, is to be below them every now and then, and sometimes much below. Again, on the speculative side, this defect of moral experience penetrates into the distinguishing excellence of the character,—its brooding and meditative religion. Those who see life under only one aspect, can see religion under only one likewise. This world is needful to interpret what is beyond; the seen must explain the unseen. It is from a tried and a varied and a troubled moral life that the deepest and truest ideas of God arise. The ascetic character wants these; therefore in its religion there will be a harshness of outline, a bareness, so to say, as well as a grandeur. In life we may look for a singular purity; but also, and with equal probability, for singular self-confidence, a certain unsympathising straitness, and perhaps a few singular errors.

The character of the ascetic, or austere species of goodness, is almost exactly embodied in Milton. Men, indeed, are formed on no ideal type. Human nature has tendencies too various, and circumstances too complex. All men's characters have sides and aspects not to be comprehended in a single definition; but in this case, the extent to which the character of the man, as we find it delineated, approaches to the moral abstraction which we sketch from theory, is remarkable. The whole being of Milton may, in some sort, be summed up in the great commandment of the austere character, 'Reverence thyself.' We find it expressed in almost every one of his singular descriptions of himself,—of those striking passages which are scattered

through all his works, and which add to whatever interest may intrinsically belong to them one of the rarest of artistic charms, that of magnanimous autobiography. They have been quoted a thousand times, but one of them may perhaps be quoted again. 'I had my time, readers, as others have, who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places, where the opinion was it might be soonest attained; and as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended; whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for that matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome: for that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye. Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections, which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises: for albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle; yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious. Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred: whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast: for by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought

with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy.'

It may be fanciful to add, and we may be laughed at, but we believe that the self-reverencing propensity was a little aided by his singular personal beauty. All the describers of his youth concur in telling us that this was very remarkable. Mr. Masson has the following account of it:—

'When Milton left Cambridge in July 1632, he was twenty-three years and eight months old. In stature, therefore, at least, he was already whatever he was to be. "In stature," he says himself at a later period, when driven to speak on the subject, "I confess I am not tall, but still of what is nearer to middle height than to little: and what if I were of little; of which stature have often been very great men both in peace and war—though why should that be called little which is great enough for virtue?" ("*Staturâ, fateor, non sum procerâ, sed quæ mediocri tamen quàm parvæ propior sit; sed quid si parvâ, quâ et summi sæpe tum pace tum bello viri fuere—quanquam parva cur dicitur, quæ ad virtutem satis magna est?*") This is precise enough; but we have Aubrey's words to the same effect: "He was scarce so tall as I am," says Aubrey; to which, to make it more intelligible, he appends the marginal note:—"*Qu. Quot* feet I am high? *Resp.* Of middle stature;"—i.e. Milton was a little under middle height. "He had light brown hair," continues Aubrey,—putting the word "abrown" ("auburn") in the margin by way of synonym for "light brown;"—his complexion exceeding fair; oval face; his eye a dark gray."'

We are far from accusing Milton of personal vanity. His character was too enormous, if we may be allowed so to say, for a fault so petty. But a little tinge of excessive self-respect will

cling to those who can admire themselves. Ugly men are and ought to be ashamed of their existence. Milton was not so.

The peculiarities of the austere type of character stand out in Milton more remarkably than in other men who partake of it, because of the extreme strength of his nature. In reading him this is the first thing that strikes us. We seem to have left the little world of ordinary writers. The words of some authors are said to have 'hands and feet;' they seem, that is, to have a vigour and animation which only belong to things which live and move. Milton's words have not this animal life. There is no rude energy about them. But, on the other hand, they have, or seem to have, a soul, a spirit which other words have not. He was early aware that what he wrote, 'by certain vital signs it had,' was such as the world would not 'willingly let die.' After two centuries we feel the same. There is a solemn and firm music in the lines; a brooding sublimity haunts them; the spirit of the great writer moves over the face of the page. In life there seems to have been the same peculiar strength that his work suggests to us. His moral tenacity is amazing. He took his own course, and he kept his own course; and we may trace in his defects the same characteristics. 'Energy and ill-temper,' some say, 'are the same thing;' and though this is a strong exaggeration, yet there is a basis of truth in it. People who labour much will be cross if they do not obtain that for which they labour; those who desire vehemently will be vexed if they do not obtain that which they desire. As is the strength of the impelling tendency, so, other things being equal, is the pain which it will experience if it be baffled. Those, too, who are set on what is high will be proportionately offended by the intrusion of what is low. Accordingly, Milton is described by those who knew him as a 'harsh and choleric man.' 'He had,' we are told, 'a gravity in his temper, not melancholy, or not till the latter part of his life,—not sour, not morose, not ill-natured; but a certain severity of mind, not condescending to little things;'—and this, although his daughter remembered that he was delightful company, the life of conversation, and that he was so 'on account of a flow of subjects and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility.' Doubtless this may have been so when he was at ease, and at home. But there are unmistakable traces of the harsher tendency in almost all his works.

Some of the peculiarities of the ascetic character were like-

wise augmented by his studious disposition. This began very early in life, and continued till the end. 'My father,' he says, 'destined me to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the twelfth year of my age I hardly ever retired to rest from my studies till midnight; which was the first source of injury to my eyes, to the natural weakness of which were added frequent headaches: all of which not retarding my eagerness after knowledge, he took care to have me instructed,' &c. Every page of his works shows the result of this education. In spite of the occupations of manhood, and the blindness and melancholy of old age, he still continued to have his principal pleasure in that 'studious and select' reading, which, though often curiously transmuted, is perpetually involved in the very texture of his works. We need not stay to observe how a habit in itself so austere conduces to the development of an austere character. Deep study, especially deep study which haunts and rules the imagination, necessarily removes men from life, absorbs them in themselves; purifies their conduct, with some risk of isolating their sympathies; develops that loftiness of mood which is gifted with deep inspirations and indulged with great ideas, but which tends in its excess to engender a contempt for others, and a self-appreciation which is even more displeasing to them.

These same tendencies were aggravated also by two defects which are exceedingly rare in great English authors, and which perhaps Milton alone amongst those of the highest class is in a remarkable degree chargeable with. We mean a deficiency in humour, and a deficiency in a knowledge of plain human nature. Probably when, after the lapse of ages, English literature is looked at in its larger features only, and in comparison with other literatures which have preceded or which may follow it, the critics will lay down that its most striking characteristic as a whole is its involution, so to say, in life; the degree to which its book-life resembles real life; the extent to which the motives, dispositions, and actions of common busy persons are represented in a medium which would seem likely to give us peculiarly the ideas of secluded, and the tendencies of meditative men. It is but an aspect of this fact, that English literature abounds,—some critics will say abounds excessively,—with humour. This is in some sense the imaginative element of ordinary life,—the relieving charm, partaking at once of con-

trast and similitude, which gives a human and an intellectual interest to the world of clowns and cottages, of fields and farmers. The degree to which Milton is deficient in this element is conspicuous in every page of his writings where its occurrence could be looked for; and if we do not always look for it, this is because the subjects of his most remarkable works are on a removed elevation, where ordinary life, the world of 'cakes and ale,' is never thought of and never expected. It is in his dramas, as we should expect, that Milton shows this deficiency the most. 'Citizens' never talk in his pages, as they do in Shakespeare. We feel instinctively that Milton's eye had never rested with the same easy pleasure on the easy, ordinary, shop-keeping world. Perhaps, such is the complication of art, that it is on the most tragic occasions that we feel this want the most. It may seem an odd theory, and yet we believe it to be a true principle, that catastrophes require a comic element. We appear to feel the same principle in life. We may read solemn descriptions of great events in history,—say of Lord Stafford's trial, and of his marvellous speech, and his appeal to his 'saint in heaven;' but we comprehend the whole transaction much better when we learn from Mr. Baillie, the eye-witness, that people ate nuts and apples, and talked, and laughed, and betted on the great question of acquittal and condemnation. Nor is it difficult to understand why this should be so. It seems to be a law of the imagination, at least in most men, that it will not bear concentration. It is essentially a glancing faculty. It goes and comes, and comes and goes, and we hardly know whence or why. But we most of us know that when we try to fix it, in a moment it passes away. Accordingly, the proper procedure of art is to let it go in such a manner as to ensure its coming back again. The force of artistic contrasts effects exactly this result. Skilfully-disposed opposites suggest the notion of each other. We realise more perfectly and easily the great idea, the tragic conception, when we are familiarised with its effects on the minds of little people,—with the petty consequences which it causes, as well as with the enormous forces from which it comes. The catastrophe of Samson Agonistes discloses Milton's imperfect mastery of this element of effect. If ever there was an occasion which admitted its perfect employment, it was this. The kind of catastrophe is exactly that which is sure to strike, and strike forcibly, the

minds of common persons. If their observations on the occasion were really given to us, we could scarcely avoid something rather comic. The eccentricity, so to speak, of ordinary persons, shows itself peculiarly at such times, and they say the queerest things. Shakespeare has exemplified this principle most skilfully on various occasions: it is the sort of art which is just in his way. His imagination always seems to be floating between the contrasts of things; and if his mind had a resting-place that it liked, it was this ordinary view of extraordinary events. Milton was under the great obligation to use this relieving principle of art in the catastrophe of Samson, because he has made every effort to heighten the strictly tragic element, which requires that relief. His art, always serious, was never more serious. His Samson is not the incarnation of physical strength which the popular fancy embodies in the character; nor is it the simple and romantic character of the Old Testament. On the contrary, Samson has become a Puritan: the observations he makes would have done much credit to a religious pikeman in Cromwell's army. In consequence, his death requires some lightening touches to make it a properly artistic event. The pomp of seriousness becomes too oppressive.

'At length for intermission sake they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard),
As over-tired, to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy pillars
That to the archèd roof gave main support.
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fix'd, he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:
At last with head erect thus cry'd aloud,
"Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld:
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater,
As with amaze shall strike all who behold."
This utter'd, straining all his nerves he bow'd,
As with the force of winds and waters pent

When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro.
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,—
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnise this feast.
Samson with these immix'd, inevitably
Pull'd down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only 'scaped who stood without.
Chor. O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now ly'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd,
Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes, in number more
Than all thy life hath slain before.'

This is grave and fine; but Shakespeare would have done it differently and better.

We need not pause to observe how certainly this deficiency in humour and in the delineation of ordinary human feeling is connected with a recluse, a solitary, and to some extent an unsympathising life. If we combine a certain natural aloofness from common men with literary habits and an incessantly studious musing, we shall at once see how powerful a force is brought to bear on an instinctively austere character, and how sure it will be to develop the peculiar tendencies of it, both good and evil. It was to no purpose that Milton seems to have practised a sort of professional study of life. No man could rank more highly the importance to a poet of an intellectual insight into all important pursuits and 'seemly arts.' But it is not by the mere intellect that we can take in the daily occupations of mankind; we must sympathise with them, and see them in their human relations. A chimney-sweeper, *quâ* chimney-sweeper, is not very sentimental; it is in himself that he is so interesting.

Milton's austere character is in some sort the more evident, because he possessed in large measure a certain relieving element, in which those who are eminent in that character are very deficient. Generally such persons have but obtuse senses. We are prone to attribute the purity of their conduct to the dullness of their sensations. Milton had no such obtuseness. He had every opportunity for knowing the world of eye and ear. You cannot open his works without seeing how much he did know of it. The austerity of his nature was not caused by the deficiency of his senses, but by an excess of the warning instinct. Even when he professed to delineate the world of sensuous delight, this instinct shows itself. Dr. Johnson thought he could discern melancholy in 'L'Allegro.'. If he had said solitariness, it would have been correct.

The peculiar nature of Milton's character is very conspicuous in the events of his domestic life, and in the views which he took of the great public revolutions of his age. We can spare only a very brief space for the examination of either of these; but we will endeavour to say a few words upon each of them.

The circumstances of Milton's first marriage are as singular as any in the strange series of the loves of the poets. The scene opens with an affair of business. Milton's father, as is well-known, was a scrivener—a kind of professional money-lender, then well known in London; and having been early connected with the vicinity of Oxford, continued afterwards to have pecuniary transactions of a certain nature with country gentlemen of that neighbourhood. In the course of these he advanced 500*l.* to a certain Mr. Richard Powell, a squire of fair landed estate, residing at Forest Hill, which is about four miles from the town of Oxford. The money was lent on the 11th of June, 1627; and a few months afterwards Mr. Milton the elder gave 312*l.* of it to his son the poet, who was then a youth at college, and made a formal memorandum of the same in the form then usual, which still exists. The debt was never wholly discharged; for in 1651 we find Milton declaring on oath that he had never received more than 180*l.*, 'in part satisfaction of his said just and principal debt, with damages for the same and his costs of suit.' Mr. Keightley supposes him to have 'taken many a ride over to Forest Hill' after he left Cambridge and was living at Horton

which is not very far distant; but of course this is only conjecture. We only know that about 1643 'he took,' as his nephew relates, 'a journey into the country, nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was more than a journey of recreation. After a month's stay he returns a married man, who set out a bachelor; his wife being Mary, the eldest daughter of Mr. Richard Powell, then a justice of the peace' for the county of Oxford. The suddenness of the event is rather striking; but Philips was at the time one of Milton's pupils, and it is possible that some pains may have been taken to conceal the love-affair from the 'young gentlemen.' Still, as Philips was Milton's nephew, he was likely to hear such intelligence tolerably early; and as he does not seem to have done so, the *dénouement* was probably rather prompt. At any rate, he was certainly married at that time, and took his bride home to his house in Aldersgate Street; and there was feasting and gaiety according to the usual custom of such events. A few weeks after, the lady went home to her friends, in which there was of course nothing remarkable; but it is singular that when the natural limit of her visit at home was come, she absolutely refused to return to her husband. The grounds of so strange a resolution are very difficult to ascertain. Political feeling ran very high: old Mr. Powell adhered to the side of the king, and Milton to that of the parliament; and this might be fancied to have caused an estrangement. But on the other hand, these circumstances must have been well known three months before. Nothing had happened in that quarter of a year to change very materially the position of the two parties in the State. Some other cause for Mrs. Milton's conduct must be looked for. She herself is said to have stated that she did not like her husband's 'spare diet and hard study.' No doubt, too, she found it dull in London; she had probably always lived in the country, and must have been quite unaccustomed to the not very pleasant scene in which she found herself. Still, many young ladies have married schoolmasters, and many young ladies have gone from Oxfordshire to London; and nevertheless, no such dissolution of matrimonial harmony is known to have occurred.

The fact we believe to be, that the bride took a dislike to her husband. We cannot but have a suspicion that she did not like him before marriage, and that pecuniary reasons had their influence. If, however, Mr. Powell exerted his paternal

influence, it may be admitted that he had unusual considerations to advance in favour of the alliance he proposed. It is not every father whose creditors are handsome young gentlemen with fair incomes. Perhaps it seemed no extreme tyranny to press the young lady a little to do that which some others might have done without pressing. Still, all this is but hypothesis; the evidence to the love-affairs of the time of King Charles I. is but meagre. But, whatever the feelings of Miss Powell may have been, those of Mrs. Milton are exceedingly certain. She would not return to her husband; she did not answer his letters; and a messenger whom he sent to bring her back was handled rather roughly. Unquestionably, she was deeply to blame, by far the most to blame of the two. Whatever may be alleged against him, is as nothing compared with her offence in leaving him. To defend so startling a course, we must adopt views of divorce even more extreme than those which Milton was himself driven to inculcate; and whatever Mrs. Milton's practice may have been, it may be fairly conjectured that her principles were strictly orthodox. Yet, if she could be examined by a commission to the ghosts, she would probably have some palliating circumstances to allege in mitigation of judgment. There were, perhaps, peculiarities in Milton's character which a young lady might not improperly dislike. The austere and ascetic character is of course far less agreeable to women than the sensuous and susceptible. The self-occupation, the pride, the abstraction of the former are to the female mind disagreeable; studious habits and unusual self-denial seem to it purposeless; lofty enthusiasm, public spirit, the solitary pursuit of an elevated ideal, are quite out of its way: they rest too little on the visible world to be intelligible, they are too little suggested by the daily occurrences of life to seem possible. The poet in search of an imaginary phantom has never been successful with women; there are innumerable proofs of that; and the ascetic moralist is even less interesting. A character combined out of the two—and this to some extent was Milton's—is singularly likely to meet with painful failure; with a failure the more painful, that it could never anticipate or explain it. Possibly he was absorbed in an austere self-conscious excellence; it may never have occurred to him that a lady might prefer the trivial detail of daily happiness.

Milton's own view of the matter he has explained to us in

his book on divorce; and it is a very odd one. His complaint was that his wife would not talk. What he wished in marriage was an 'intimate and speaking help;' he encountered a 'mute and spiritless mate.' One of his principal incitements to the 'pious necessity of divorcing,' was an unusual deficiency in household conversation. A certain loquacity in their wives has been the complaint of various eminent men; but his domestic affliction was a different one. The 'ready and reviving associate,' whom he had hoped to have found, appeared to be a 'co-inhabiting mischief,' who was sullen, and perhaps seemed bored and tired. And at times he is disposed to cast the blame of his misfortune on the uninstructive nature of youthful virtue. The 'soberest and best-governed men,' he says, are least practised in such affairs, are not very well aware that 'the bashful muteness' of a young lady 'may oft-times hide the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation;' and are rather in too great haste to light the nuptial torch: whereas those 'who have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches; because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience.' And he rather wishes to infer that the virtuous man should, in case of mischance, have his resource of divorce likewise.

In truth, Milton's book on divorce—though only containing principles which he continued to believe long after he had any personal reasons for wishing to do so—were clearly suggested at first by the unusual phenomena of his first marriage. His wife began by not speaking to him, and finished by running away from him. Accordingly, like most books which spring out of personal circumstances, his treatises on this subject have a frankness, and a mastery of detail, which others on the same topic sometimes want. He is remarkably free from one peculiarity of modern writers on such matters. Several considerate gentlemen are extremely anxious for the 'rights of woman.' They think that women will benefit by removing the bulwarks which the misguided experience of ages has erected for their protection. A migratory system of domestic existence might suit Madame Dudevant, and a few cases of singular exception; but we cannot fancy that it would be, after all, so much to the taste of most ladies as the present more permanent system. We have some reminiscence of the

stories of the wolf and the lamb, when we hear amiable men addressing a female auditory (in books of course) on the advantages of a freer 'development.' We are perhaps wrong, but we cherish an indistinct suspicion that an indefinite extension of the power of selection would rather tend to the advantage of the sex which more usually chooses. But we have no occasion to avow such opinions now. Milton had no such modern views. He is frankly and honestly anxious for the rights of the man. Of the doctrine that divorce is only permitted for the help of wives, he exclaims, 'Palpably uxorious! who can be ignorant, that a woman was created for man, and not man for woman? What an injury is it after wedlock to be slighted! what to be contended with in point of house-rule who shall be the head; not for any parity of wisdom, for that were something reasonable, but out of a female pride! "I suffer not," saith St. Paul, "the woman to usurp authority over the man." If the Apostle could not suffer it,' he naturally remarks, 'into what mould is he mortified that can?' He had a sincere desire to preserve men from the society of unsocial and unsympathising women; and that was his principal idea.

His theory, to a certain extent, partakes of the same notion. The following passage contains a perspicuous exposition of it: 'Moses, Deut. xxiv. 1, established a grave and prudent law, full of moral equity, full of due consideration towards nature, that cannot be resisted, a law consenting with the wisest men and civilest nations; that when a man hath married a wife, if it come to pass that he cannot love her by reason of some displeasing natural quality or unfitness in her, let him write her a bill of divorce. The intent of which law undoubtedly was this, that if any good and peaceable man should discover some helpless disagreement or dislike, either of mind or body, whereby he could not cheerfully perform the duty of a husband without the perpetual dissembling of offence and disturbance to his spirit; rather than to live uncomfortably and unhappily both to himself and to his wife; rather than to continue undertaking a duty, which he could not possibly discharge, he might dismiss her, whom he could not tolerably, and so not conscionably, retain. And this law the Spirit of God by the mouth of Solomon, Prov. xxx. 21, 23, testifies to be a good and a necessary law, by granting it that "a hated woman" (for so the Hebrew word signifies, rather

than "odious," though it come all to one), that "a hated woman, when she is married, is a thing that the earth cannot bear." ' And he complains that the civil law of modern states interferes with the 'domestical prerogative of the husband.'

His notion would seem to have been that a husband was bound not to dismiss his wife, except for a reason really sufficient; such as a thoroughly incompatible temper, an incorrigible 'muteness,' and a desertion like that of Mrs. Milton. But he scarcely liked to admit that, in the use of this power, he should be subject to the correction of human tribunals. He thought that the circumstances of each case depended upon 'utterless facts;' and that it was practically impossible for a civil court to decide on a subject so delicate in its essence, and so imperceptible in its data. But though amiable men doubtless suffer much from the deficiencies of their wives, we should hardly like to intrust them, in their own cases, with a jurisdiction so prompt and summary.

We are far from being concerned, however, just now with the doctrine of divorce on its intrinsic merits: we were only intending to give such an account of Milton's opinions upon it as might serve to illustrate his character. We think we have shown that it is possible there may have been, in his domestic relations, a little overweening pride; a tendency to overrate the true extent of masculine rights, and to dwell on his wife's duty to be social towards him rather than on his duty to be social towards her,—to be rather sullen whenever she was not quite cheerful. Still, we are not defending a lady for leaving her husband for defects of such inferior magnitude. Few households would be kept together, if the right of transition were exercised on such trifling occasions. We are but suggesting that she may share the excuse which our great satirist has suggested for another unreliable lady: 'My mother was an angel; but angels are not always *commodes à vivre*.'

This is not a pleasant part of our subject, and we must leave it. It is more agreeable to relate that on no occasion of his life was the substantial excellence of Milton's character more conclusively shown, than in his conduct at the last stage of this curious transaction. After a very considerable interval, and after the publication of his book on divorce, Mrs. Milton showed a disposition to return to her husband; and in spite of his theories, he received her with open arms. With great

Christian patience, he received her relations too. The Parliamentary party was then victorious; and old Mr. Powell, who had suffered very much in the cause of the king, lived until his death untroubled, and 'wholly to his devotion,' as we are informed, in the house of his son-in-law.

Of the other occurrences of Milton's domestic life we have left ourselves no room to speak; we must turn to our second source of illustration for his character,—his opinions on the great public events of his time. It may seem odd, but we believe that a man of austere character naturally tends *both* to an excessive party spirit and to an extreme isolation. Of course the circumstances which develop the one must be different from those which are necessary to call out the other: party-spirit requires companionship; isolation, if we may be pardoned so original a remark, excludes it. But though, as we have shown, this species of character is prone to mental solitude, lends an intellectual isolation where it is possible and as soon as it can, yet when invincible circumstances throw it into mental companionship, when it is driven into earnest association with earnest men on interesting topics, its zeal becomes excessive. Such a man's mind is at home only with its own enthusiasm; it is cooped up within the narrow limits of its own ideas, and it can make no allowance for those who differ from or oppose them. We may see something of this excessive party-zeal in Burke. No one's reasons are more philosophical; yet no one who acted with a party, went further in aid of it or was more violent in support of it. He forgot what could be said for the tenets of the enemy; his imagination made that enemy an abstract incarnation of his tenets. A man, too, who knows that he formed his opinions originally by a genuine and intellectual process, is but little aware of the undue energy those ideas may obtain from the concurrence of those around. Persons who first acquired their ideas at second-hand, are more open to a knowledge of their own weakness, and better acquainted with the strange force which there is in the sympathy of others. The isolated mind, when it acts with the popular feeling, is apt to exaggerate that feeling for the most part by an almost inevitable consequence of the feelings which render it isolated. Milton is an example of this remark. In the commencement of the struggle between Charles I. and the Parliament he sympathised strongly with the popular movement,

and carried to what seems now a strange extreme his partisanship. No one could imagine that the first literary Englishman of his time could write the following passage on Charles I.:

'Who can with patience hear this filthy, rascally Fool speak so irreverently of Persons eminent both in Greatness and Piety? Dare you compare King *David* with King *Charles*; a most Religious King and Prophet, with a Superstitious Prince, and who was but a Novice in the Christian Religion; a most prudent, wise Prince with a weak one; a valiant Prince with a cowardly one; finally, a most just Prince with a most unjust one? Have you the impudence to commend his Chastity and Sobriety, who is known to have committed all manner of Leudness in company with his Confident the Duke of *Buckingham?* It were to no purpose to enquire into the private Actions of his Life, who publickly at Plays would embrace and kiss the Ladies.'

Whatever may be the faults of that ill-fated monarch,—and they assuredly were not small,—no one would now think this absurd invective to be even an excusable exaggeration. It misses the true mark altogether, and is the expression of a strongly imaginative mind, which has seen something that it did not like, and is unable in consequence to see anything that has any relation to it distinctly or correctly. But with the supremacy of the Long Parliament Milton's attachment to their cause ceased. No one has drawn a more unfavourable picture of the rule which they established. Years after their supremacy had passed away, and the restoration of the monarchy had covered with a new and strange scene the old actors and the old world, he thrust into a most unlikely part of his *History of England* the following attack on them:—

'But when once the superficiall zeal and popular fumes that acted their New Magistracy were cool'd, and spent in them, strait every one betook himself (setting the Commonwealth behind, his privat ends before) to doe as his own profit or ambition ledd him. Then was justice delay'd, and soon after deni'd: spight and favour determin'd all: hence faction, thence treachery, both at home and in the field: ev'ry where wrong, and oppression: foull and horrid deeds committed daily, or maintain'd, in secret, or in open. Som who had bin call'd from shops and warehouses, without other merit, to sit in Supreme

Councills and Committees (as thir breeding was) fell to huckster the Commonwealth. Others did therafter as men could soothe and humour them best; so hee who would give most, or, under covert of hypocriticall zeale, insinuat basest, enjoy'd unworthily the rewards of lerning and fidelity; or escap'd the punishment of his crimes and misdeeds. Thir Votes and Ordinances, which men looked should have contain'd the repealing of bad laws, and the immediat constitution of better, resounded with nothing els, but new Impositions, Taxes, Excises; yeerly, monthly, weekly. Not to reckon the Offices, Gifts, and Preferments bestow'd and shar'd among themselvs.'

His dislike of this system of committees, and of the generally dull and unemphatic administration of the Commonwealth, attached him to the Puritan army and to Cromwell; but in the continuation of the passage we have referred to, he expresses, with something, let it be said, of a schoolmaster feeling, an unfavourable judgment on their career.

'For *Britan*, to speak a truth not oft'n spok'n, as it is a Land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in warr, soe it is naturally not over-fertill of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting onely in thir Motherwit; who consider not justly, that civility, prudence, love of the Publick good, more then of money or vaine honour, are to this soile in a manner outlandish; grow not here, but in mindes well implanted with solid and elaborat breeding, too impolitic els and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and vertue either of executing or understanding true Civill Government. Valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious, and unwise: in good or bad succes, alike unteachable. For the Sun, which wee want, ripens wits as well as fruits; and as Wine and Oil are imported to us from abroad, soe must ripe understanding, and many Civill Vertues, be imported into our mindes from Foren Writings, and examples of best Ages; we shall els miscarry still, and com short in the attempts of any great enterprize. Hence did thir Victories prove as fruitles, as thir Losses dang'rous; and left them still conq'ring under the same greevances, that Men suffer conquer'd: which was indeed unlikely to goe otherwise, unles Men more then vulgar bred up, as few of them were, in the knowledg of antient and illustrious deeds,

invincible against many and vaine Titles, impartial to Freindships and Relations, had conducted thir Affairs: but then from the Chapman to the Retailer, many whose ignorance was more audacious than the rest, were admitted with all thir sordid Rudiments to bear no meane sway among them, both in Church and State.'

We need not speak of Milton's disapprobation of the Restoration. Between him and the world of Charles II. the opposition was inevitable and infinite. Therefore the general fact remains, that except in the early struggles, when he exaggerated the popular feeling, he remained solitary in opinion, and had very little sympathy with any of the prevailing parties of his time.

Milton's own theory of government is to be learned from his works. He advocated a free commonwealth, without rule of a single person, or House of Lords: but the form of his projected commonwealth was peculiar. He thought that a certain perpetual council, which should be elected by the nation once for all, and the number of which should be filled up as vacancies might occur, was the best possible machine of government. He did not confine his admiration to abstract theory, but proposed the immediate establishment of such a council in this country. We need not go into an elaborate discussion to show the errors of this conclusion. Hardly any one, then or since, has probably adopted it. The interest of the theoretical parts of Milton's political works is entirely historical. The tenets advocated are not of great value, and the arguments by which he supports them are perhaps of less; but their relation to the times in which they were written gives them a very singular interest. The time of the Commonwealth was the only period in English history in which the fundamental questions of government have been thrown open for popular discussion in this country. We read in French literature discussions on the advisability of establishing a monarchy, on the advisability of establishing a republic, on the advisability of establishing an empire; and before we proceed to examine the arguments, we cannot help being struck at the strange contrast which this multiplicity of open questions presents to our own uninquiring acquiescence in the hereditary polity which has descended to us. 'King, Lords, and Commons' are, we think, ordinances of nature. Yet Milton's political writings embody the reflections

of a period when, for a few years, the government of England was nearly as much a subject of fundamental discussion as that of France was in 1851. An 'invitation to thinkers,' to borrow the phrase of Neckar, was given by the circumstances of the time; and, with the habitual facility of philosophical speculation, it was accepted, and used to the utmost.

Such are not the kind of speculations in which we expect assistance from Milton. It is not in its transactions with others, in its dealings with the manifold world, that the isolated and austere mind shows itself to the most advantage. Its strength lies in itself. It has 'a calm and pleasing solitariness.' It hears thoughts which others cannot hear. It enjoys the quiet and still air of delightful studies; and is ever conscious of such musing and poetry 'as is not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her twin daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar.'

> 'Descend from Heav'n, Urania, by that name
> If rightly thou art call'd, whose voice divine
> Following, above th' Olympian hill I soar,
> Above the flight of Pegaséan wing.
> The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
> Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
> Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly born:
> Before the hills appear'd, or fountain flow'd,
> Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
> Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
> In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleased
> With thy celestial song. Up led by Thee
> Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presumed,
> An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
> Thy temp'ring. With like safety guided down,
> Return me to my native element;
> Lest from this flying steed, unrein'd (as once
> Bellerophon, though from a lower clime),
> Dismounted, on th' Aleian field I fall
> Erroneous, there to wander and forlorn.
> Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
> Within the visible diurnal sphere;

Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the east: still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few;
But drive far off the barb'rous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
To rapture, till the savage clamour drown'd
Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores;
For thou art heav'nly, she an empty dream.'

'An ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black: pale, but not cadaverous.' 'He used also to sit in a gray coarse cloth coat at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields, in warm, sunny weather;' and the common people said he was inspired.

If from the man we turn to his works, we are struck at once with two singular contrasts. The first of them is this. The distinction between ancient and modern art is sometimes said, and truly perhaps, to consist in the simple bareness of the imaginative conceptions which we find in ancient art, and the comparatively complex clothing in which all modern creations are embodied. If we adopt this distinction, Milton seems in some sort ancient, and in some sort modern. Nothing is so simple as the subject-matter of his works. The two greatest of his creations—the character of Satan and the character of Eve—are two of the simplest—the latter probably the very simplest—in the whole field of literature. On this side Milton's art is classical. On the other hand, in no writer is the imagery more profuse, the illustrations more various, the dress altogether more splendid. And in this respect the style of his art seems romantic and modern. In real truth, however, it is only ancient art in a modern disguise. The dress is a

mere dress, and can be stripped off when we will. We all of us do perhaps in memory strip it off for ourselves. Notwithstanding the lavish adornments with which her image is presented, the character of Eve is still the simplest sort of feminine essence—the pure embodiment of that inner nature, which we believe and hope that women have. The character of Satan, though it is not so easily described, has nearly as few elements in it. The most purely modern conceptions will not bear to be unclothed in this matter. Their romantic garment clings inseparably to them. Hamlet or Lear are not to be thought of except as complex characters, with very involved and complicated embodiments. They are as difficult to draw out in words as the common characters of life are; that of Hamlet, perhaps, is more so. If we make it, as perhaps we should, the characteristic of modern and romantic art that it presents us with creations which we cannot think of or delineate except as very varied, and, so to say, circumstantial, we must not rank Milton among the masters of romantic art. And without involving the subject in the troubled sea of an old controversy, we may say that the most striking of the poetical peculiarities of Milton is the bare simplicity of his ideas, and the rich abundance of his illustrations.

Another of his peculiarities is equally striking. There seems to be such a thing as second-hand poetry. Some poets, musing on the poetry of other men, have unconsciously shaped it into something of their own: the new conception is like the original, it would never probably have existed had not the original existed previously; still it is sufficiently different from the original to be a new thing, not a copy or a plagiarism; it is a creation, though, so to say, a suggested creation. Gray is as good an example as can be found of a poet whose works abound in this species of semi-original conceptions. Industrious critics track his best lines back, and find others like them which doubtless lingered near his fancy while he was writing them. The same critics have been equally busy with the works of Milton, and equally successful. They find traces of his reading in half his works; not, which any reader could do, in overt similes and distinct illustrations, but also in the very texture of the thought and the expression. In many cases, doubtless, they discover more than he himself knew. A mind like his, which has an immense store of imaginative recollec-

tions, can never know which of his own imaginations is exactly suggested by which recollection. Men awake with their best ideas; it is seldom worth while to investigate very curiously whence they came. Our proper business is to adapt, and mould, and act upon them. Of poets perhaps this is true even more remarkably than of other men; their ideas are suggested in modes, and according to laws, which are even more impossible to specify than the ideas of the rest of the world. Second-hand poetry, so to say, often seems quite original to the poet himself; he frequently does not know that he derived it from an old memory; years afterwards it may strike him as it does others. Still, in general, such inferior species of creation is not so likely to be found in minds of singular originality as in those of less. A brooding, placid, cultivated mind, like that of Gray, is the place where we should expect to meet with it. Great originality disturbs the adaptive process, removes the mind of the poet from the thoughts of other men, and occupies it with its own heated and flashing thoughts. Poetry of the second degree is like the secondary rocks of modern geology—a still, gentle, alluvial formation; the igneous glow of primary genius brings forth ideas like the primeval granite, simple, astounding, and alone. Milton's case is an exception to this rule. His mind has marked originality, probably as much of it as any in literature; but it has as much of moulded recollection as any mind too. His poetry in consequence is like an artificial park, green, and soft, and beautiful, yet with outlines bold, distinct, and firm, and the eternal rock ever jutting out; or, better still, it is like our own lake scenery, where nature has herself the same combination—where we have Rydal water side by side with the everlasting upheaved mountain. Milton has the same union of softened beauty with unimpaired grandeur; and it is his peculiarity.

These are the two contrasts which puzzle us at first in Milton, and which distinguish him from other poets in our remembrance afterwards. We have a superficial complexity in illustration, and imagery, and metaphor; and in contrast with it we observe a latent simplicity of idea, an almost rude strength of conception. The underlying thoughts are few, though the flowers on the surface are so many. We have likewise the perpetual contrast of the soft poetry of the memory, and the firm, as it were fused, and glowing poetry of the

imagination. His words, we may half fancifully say, are like his character. There is the same austerity in the real essence, the same exquisiteness of sense, the same delicacy of form which we know that he had, the same music which we imagine there was in his voice. In both his character and his poetry there was an ascetic nature in a sheath of beauty.

No book perhaps which has ever been written is more difficult to criticise than *Paradise Lost*. The only way to criticise a work of the imagination, is to describe its effect upon the mind of the reader—at any rate, of the critic; and this can only be adequately delineated by strong illustrations, apt similes, and perhaps a little exaggeration. The task is in its very nature not an easy one; the poet paints a picture on the fancy of the critic, and the critic has in some sort to copy it on the paper. He must say what it is before he can make remarks upon it. But in the case of *Paradise Lost* we hardly like to use illustrations. The subject is one which the imagination rather shrinks from. At any rate, it requires courage, and an effort to compel the mind to view such a subject as distinctly and vividly as it views other subjects. Another peculiarity of *Paradise Lost* makes the difficulty even greater. It does not profess to be a mere work of art; or rather, it claims to be by no means that, and that only. It starts with a dogmatic aim; it avowedly intends to

> 'assert eternal providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man.'

In this point of view we have always had a sympathy with the Cambridge mathematician who has been so much abused. He said, 'After all, *Paradise Lost proves* nothing;' and various persons of poetical tastes and temperaments have been very severe on the prosaic observation. Yet, 'after all,' he was right. Milton professed to prove something. He was too profound a critic—rather, he had too profound an instinct of those eternal principles of art which criticism tries to state—not to know that on such a subject he must prove something. He professed to deal with the great problem of human destiny; to show why man was created, in what kind of universe he lives, whence he came, and whither he goes. He dealt of necessity with the greatest of subjects. He had to sketch the greatest of objects. He was concerned with infinity and eternity even

more than with time and sense; he undertook to delineate the ways, and consequently the character of Providence, as well as the conduct and the tendencies of man. The essence of success in such an attempt is to satisfy the religious sense of man; to bring home to our hearts what we know to be true; to teach us what we have not seen; to awaken us to what we have forgotten; to remove the 'covering' from all people, and 'the veil' that is spread over all nations; to give us, in a word, such a conception of things, divine and human, as we can accept, believe, and trust. The true doctrine of criticism demands what Milton invites—an examination of the degree in which the great epic attains this aim. And if, in examining it, we find it necessary to use unusual illustrations, and plainer words than are customary, it must be our excuse that we do not think the subject can be made clear without them.

The defect of *Paradise Lost* is that, after all, it is founded on a *political* transaction. The scene is in heaven very early in the history of the universe, before the creation of man or the fall of Satan. We have a description of a court. The angels,

'By imperial summons called,'

appear

'Under their hierarchs in orders bright:
Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,
Standards and gonfalons 'twixt van and rear
Stream in the air, and for distinction serve
Of hierarchies, and orders, and degrees.'

To this assemblage 'th' Omnipotent' speaks:

'Hear, all ye Angels, progeny of light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand:
This day I have begot whom I declare
My only Son; and on this holy hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow
All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
Under his great viceregent reign abide
United as one individual soul
For ever happy. Him who disobeys,
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,

> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Int' utter darkness, deep ingulph'd, his place
> Ordain'd without redemption, without end.'

This act of patronage was not popular at court; and why should it have been? The religious sense is against it. The worship which sinful men owe to God is not transferable to lieutenants and viceregents. The whole scene of the court jars upon a true feeling. We seem to be reading about some emperor of history, who admits his son to a share in the empire, who confers on him a considerable jurisdiction, and requires officials, with 'standards and gonfalons,' to bow before him. The orthodoxy of Milton is quite as questionable as his accuracy. The old Athanasian creed was not made by persons who would allow such a picture as that of Milton to stand before their imaginations. The generation of the Son was to them a fact 'before all time;' an eternal fact. There was no question in their minds of patronage or promotion. The Son was the Son before all time, just as the Father was the Father before all time. Milton had in such matters a bold but not very sensitive imagination. He accepted the inevitable materialism of biblical, and, to some extent, of all religious language as distinct revelation. He certainly believed, in contradiction to the old creed, that God had both 'parts and passions.' He imagined that earth

> 'Is but the shadow of heaven and things therein,
> Each to other like more than on earth is thought.'

From some passages it would seem that he actually thought of God as having 'the members and form' of a man. Naturally, therefore, he would have no toleration for the mysterious notions of time and eternity which are involved in the traditional doctrine. We are not, however, now concerned with Milton's belief, but with his representation of his creed—his picture, so to say, of it in *Paradise Lost;* still, as we cannot but think, that picture is almost irreligious, and certainly different from that which has been generally accepted in Christendom. Such phrases as 'before all time,' 'eternal generation,' are doubtless very vaguely interpreted by the mass of men; nevertheless, no sensitively orthodox man *could* have drawn the picture of a generation, not to say an exaltation, *in* time.

We shall see this more clearly by reading what follows in the poem:

'All seemed well pleased; all seemed, but were not all."

One of the archangels, whose name can be guessed, decidedly disapproved, and calls a meeting, at which he explains that

'orders and degrees
Jar not with liberty, but well consist;'

but still, that the promotion of a new person, on grounds of relationship merely, above, even infinitely above, the old angels, with imperial titles, was 'a new law,' and rather tyrannical. Abdiel,

'than whom none with more zeal adored
The Deity, and with divine commands obeyed,'

attempts a defence:

'Grant it thee unjust,
That equal over equals monarch reign:
Thyself, though great and glorious, dost thou count,
Or all angelic nature join'd in one,
Equal to him begotten Son? by whom
As by his Word the mighty Father made
All things, ev'n thee; and all the Spirits of Heav'n
By him created in their bright degrees,
Crown'd them with glory, and to their glory named
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
Essential Pow'rs; nor by his reign obscured,
But more illustrious made; since he the Head,
One of our number thus reduced becomes;
His laws our laws; all honour to him done
Returns our own. Cease then this impious rage,
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
Th' incensed Father and th' incensed Son,
While pardon may be found, in time besought.'

Yet though Abdiel's intentions were undeniably good, his argument is rather specious. Acting as an instrument in the process of creation would scarcely give a valid claim to the obedience of the created being. Power may be shown in the act, no doubt; but mere power gives no true claim to the obedience of moral beings. It is a kind of principle of all manner of

idolatries and false religions to believe that it does so. Satan, besides, takes issue on the fact:

> 'That we were form'd then, say'st thou? and the work
> Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
> From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
> Doctrine which we would know whence learn'd.'

And we must say that the speech in which the new ruler is introduced to the 'thrones, dominations, princedoms, powers,' is hard to reconcile with Abdiel's exposition. '*This day*' he seems to have come into existence, and could hardly have assisted at the creation of the angels, who are not young, and who converse with one another like old acquaintances.

We have gone into this part of the subject at length, because it is the source of the great error which pervades *Paradise Lost*. Satan is made *interesting*. This has been the charge of a thousand orthodox and even heterodox writers against Milton. Shelley, on the other hand, has gloried in it; and fancied, if we remember rightly, that Milton intentionally ranged himself on the Satanic side of the universe, just as Shelley himself would have done, and that he wished to show the falsity of the ordinary theology. But Milton was born an age too early for such aims, and was far too sincere to have advocated any doctrine in a form so indirect. He believed every word he said. He was not conscious of the effect his teaching would produce in an age like this, when scepticism is in the air, and when it is not possible to help looking coolly on his delineations. Probably in our boyhood we can recollect a period when any solemn description of celestial events would have commanded our respect; we should not have dared to read it intelligently, to canvass its details and see what it meant: it was a religious book; it sounded reverential, and that would have sufficed. Something like this was the state of mind of the seventeenth century. Even Milton probably shared in a vague reverence for religious language. He hardly felt the moral effect of the pictures he was drawing. His artistic instinct too, often hurries him away. His Satan was to him, as to us, the hero of his poem. Having commenced by making him resist on an occasion which in an earthly kingdom would have been excusable and proper, he probably a little sympathised with him, just as his readers do.

The interest of Satan's character is at its height in the first two books. Coleridge justly compared it to that of Napoleon. There is the same pride, the same satanic ability, the same will, the same egotism. His character seems to grow with his position. He is far finer after his fall, in misery and suffering, with scarcely any resource except in himself, than he was originally in heaven; at least if Raphael's description of him can be trusted. No portrait which imagination or history has drawn of a revolutionary anarch is nearly so perfect; there is all the grandeur of the greatest human mind, and a certain infinitude in his circumstances which humanity must ever want. Few Englishmen feel a profound reverence for Napoleon I. There was no French alliance in *his* time; we have most of us some tradition of antipathy to him. Yet hardly any Englishman can read the account of the campaign of 1814 without feeling his interest for the Emperor to be strong, and without perhaps being conscious of a latent wish that he may succeed. Our opinion is against him, our serious wish is of course for England; but the imagination has a sympathy of its own, and will not give place. We read about the great general—never greater than in that last emergency—showing resources of genius that seem almost infinite, and that assuredly have never been surpassed, yet vanquished, yielding to the power of circumstances, to the combined force of adversaries, each of whom singly he outmatches in strength, and all of whom together he surpasses in majesty and in mind. Something of the same sort of interest belongs to the Satan of the first two books of *Paradise Lost*. We know that he will be vanquished; his name is not a recommendation. Still we do not imagine distinctly the minds by which he is to be vanquished; we do not take the same interest in them that we do in him; our sympathies, our fancy, are on his side.

Perhaps much of this was inevitable; yet what a defect it is! especially what a defect in Milton's own view, and looked at with the stern realism with which he regarded it! Suppose that the author of evil in the universe were the most attractive being in it; suppose that the source of all sin were the origin of all interest to us! We need not dwell upon this.

As we have said, much of this was difficult to avoid, if indeed it could be avoided in dealing with such a theme. Even Milton shrank, in some measure, from delineating the divine

character. His imagination evidently halts when it is required to perform that task. The more delicate imagination of our modern world would shrink still more. Any person who will consider what such an attempt must end in will find his nerves quiver. But by a curiously fatal error, Milton has selected for delineation exactly that part of the divine nature which is most beyond the reach of the human faculties, and which is also, when we try to describe our fancy of it, the least effective to our minds. He has made God *argue*. Now the procedure of the divine mind from truth to truth must ever be incomprehensible to us; the notion, indeed, of his proceeding at all, is a contradiction: to some extent, at least, it is inevitable that we should use such language, but we know it is in reality inapplicable. A long train of reasoning in such a connection is so out of place as to be painful; and yet Milton has many. He relates a series of family prayers in heaven, with sermons afterwards, which are very tedious. Even Pope was shocked at the notion of Providence talking like 'a school-divine.' And there is the still worse error, that if you once attribute reasoning to him, subsequent logicians may discover that he does not reason very well.

Another way in which Milton has contrived to strengthen our interest in Satan is the number and insipidity of his good angels. There are old rules as to the necessity of a supernatural machinery for an epic poem, worth some fraction of the paper on which they are written, and derived from the practice of Homer, who believed his gods and goddesses to be real beings, and would have been rather harsh with a critic who called them machinery. These rules had probably an influence with Milton and induced him to manipulate these serious angels more than he would have done otherwise. They appear to be excellent administrators with very little to do; a kind of grand chamberlains with wings, who fly down to earth and communicate information to Adam and Eve. They have no character; they are essentially messengers, merely conductors, so to say, of the providential will: no one fancies that they have an independent power of action; they seem scarcely to have minds of their own. No effect can be more unfortunate. If the struggle of Satan had been with Deity directly, the natural instincts of religion would have been awakened; but when an angel with mind is only contrasted to angels with wings, we sympathise with the former.

In the first two books, therefore, our sympathy with Milton's Satan is great; we had almost said unqualified. The speeches he delivers are of well-known excellence. Lord Brougham, no contemptible judge of emphatic oratory, has laid down, that if a person had not an opportunity of access to the great Attic masterpieces, he had better choose these for a model. What is to be regretted about the orator is, that he scarcely acts up to his sentiments. 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven' is, at any rate, an audacious declaration. But he has no room for exhibiting similar audacity in action. His offensive career is limited. In the nature of the subject there was scarcely the possibility for the fallen archangel to display in the detail of his operations the surpassing intellect with which Milton has endowed him. He goes across chaos, gets into a few physical difficulties; but these are not much. His grand aim is the conquest of our first parents; and we are at once struck with the enormous inequality of the conflict. Two beings just created, without experience, without guile, without knowledge of good and evil, are expected to contend with a being on the delineation of whose powers every resource of art and imagination, every subtle suggestion, every emphatic simile, has been lavished. The idea in every reader's mind is, and must be, not surprise that our first parents should yield, but wonder that Satan should not think it beneath him to attack them. It is as if an army should invest a cottage.

We have spoken more of theology than we intended; and we need not say how much the monstrous inequalities attributed to the combatants affect our estimate of the results of the conflict. The state of man is what it is, because the defenceless Adam and Eve of Milton's imagination yielded to the nearly all-powerful Satan whom he has delineated. Milton has in some sense invented this difficulty; for in the book of Genesis there is no such inequality. The serpent may be subtler than any beast of the field; but he is not necessarily subtler or cleverer than man. So far from Milton having justified the ways of God to man, he has loaded the common theology with a new encumbrance.

We may need refreshment after this discussion; and we cannot find it better than in reading a few remarks of Eve.

'That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade on flow'rs, much wondering where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murm'ring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n. I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seem'd another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd,
Bending to look on me. I started back;
It started back: but pleas'd I soon return'd;
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answ'ring looks
Of sympathy and love: there I had fix'd
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warn'd me. What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself;
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine: to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd
Mother of Human Race. What could I do
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espy'd thee, fair indeed and tall
Under a platan; yet methought less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
Than that smooth wat'ry image. Back I turn'd:
Thou following cry'dst aloud, Return, fair Eve;
Whom fly'st thou?'

Eve's character, indeed, is one of the most wonderful efforts of the human imagination. She is a kind of abstract woman; essentially a typical being; an official 'mother of all living.' Yet she is a real interesting woman, not only full of delicacy and sweetness, but with all the undefinable fascination, the charm of personality, which such typical characters hardly ever

have. By what consummate miracle of wit this charm of individuality is preserved, without impairing the general idea which is ever present to us, we cannot explain, for we do not know.

Adam is far less successful. He has good hair,—'hyacinthine locks' that 'from his parted forelock manly hung;' a 'fair large front' and 'eye sublime;' but he has little else that we care for. There is, in truth, no opportunity of displaying manly virtues, even if he possessed them. He has only to yield to his wife's solicitations, which he does. Nor are we sure that he does it well. He is very tedious; he indulges in sermons which are good; but most men cannot but fear that so delightful a being as Eve must have found him tiresome. She steps away, however, and goes to sleep at some of the worst points.

Dr. Johnson remarked, that, after all, *Paradise Lost* was one of the books which no one wished longer: we fear, in this irreverent generation, some wish it shorter. Hardly any reader would be sorry if some portions of the later books had been spared him. Coleridge, indeed, discovered profound mysteries in the last; but in what could not Coleridge find a mystery if he wished? Dryden more wisely remarked, that Milton became tedious when he entered upon a 'tract of Scripture.' Nor is it surprising that such is the case. The style of many parts of Scripture is such that it will not bear addition or subtraction. A word less, or an idea more, and the effect upon the mind is the same no longer. Nothing can be more tiresome than a sermonic amplification of such passages. It is almost too much when, as from the pulpit, a paraphrastic commentary is prepared for our spiritual improvement. In deference to the intention we bear it, but we bear it unwillingly; and we cannot endure it at all when, as in poems, the object is to awaken our fancy rather than to improve our conduct. The account of the creation in the book of Genesis is one of the compositions from which no sensitive imagination would subtract an iota, to which it could not bear to add a word. Milton's paraphrase is alike copious and ineffective. The universe is, in railway phrase, 'opened,' but not created; no green earth springs in a moment from the indefinite void. Instead, too, of the simple loneliness of the Old Testament, several angelic officials are in attendance, who help in nothing, but indicate that heaven must be plentifully supplied with tame creatures.

There is no difficulty in writing such criticisms, and indeed, other unfavourable criticisms on *Paradise Lost*. There is scarcely any book in the world which is open to a greater number, or which a reader who allows plain words to produce a due effect will be less satisfied with. Yet what book is really greater? In the best parts the words have a magic in them; even in the inferior passages you are hardly sensible of their inferiority till you translate them into your own language. Perhaps no style ever written by man expressed so adequately the conceptions of a mind so strong and so peculiar; a manly strength, a haunting atmosphere of enhancing suggestions, a firm continuous music, are only some of its excellences. To comprehend the whole of the others, you must take the volume down and read it,—the best defence of Milton, as has been said most truly, against all objections.

Probably no book shows the transition which our theology has made, since the middle of the seventeenth century, at once so plainly and so fully. We do not now compose long narratives to 'justify the ways of God to man.' The more orthodox we are, the more we shrink from it; the more we hesitate at such a task, the more we allege that we have no powers for it. Our most celebrated defences of established tenets are in the style of Butler, not in that of Milton. They do not profess to show a satisfactory explanation of human destiny; on the contrary, they hint that probably we could not understand such an explanation if it were given us; at any rate, they allow that it is not given us. Their course is palliative. They suggest an 'analogy of difficulties.' If our minds were greater, so they reason, we should comprehend these doctrines: now we cannot explain analogous facts which we see and know. No style can be more opposite to the bold argument, the boastful exposition of Milton. The teaching of the eighteenth century is in the very atmosphere we breathe. We read it in the teachings of Oxford; we hear it from the missionaries of the Vatican. The air of the theology is clarified. We know our difficulties, at least; we are rather prone to exaggerate the weight of some than to deny the reality of any.

We cannot continue a line of thought which would draw us on too far for the patience of our readers. We must, however, make one more remark, and we shall have finished our criticism on *Paradise Lost*. It is analogous to that which we have just

made. The scheme of the poem is based on an offence against positive morality. The offence of Adam was not against nature or conscience, nor against any thing of which we can see the reason, or conceive the obligation, but against an unexplained injunction of the Supreme Will. The rebellion in heaven, as Milton describes it, was a rebellion, not against known ethics, or immutable spiritual laws, but against an arbitrary selection and an unexplained edict. We do not say that there is no such thing as positive morality: we do not think so; even if we did, we should not insert a proposition so startling at the conclusion of a literary criticism. But we are sure that wherever a positive moral edict is promulgated, it is no subject, except perhaps under a very peculiar treatment, for literary art. By the very nature of it, it cannot satisfy the heart and conscience. It is a difficulty; we need not attempt to explain it away. There are mysteries enough which will never be explained away. But it is contrary to every principle of criticism to state the difficulty as if it were not one; to bring forward the puzzle, yet leave it to itself; to publish so strange a problem, and give only an untrue solution of it: and yet such, in its bare statement, is all that Milton has done.

Of Milton's other writings we have left ourselves no room to speak; and though every one of them, or almost every one of them, would well repay a careful criticism, yet few of them seem to throw much additional light on his character, or add much to our essential notion of his genius, though they may exemplify and enhance it. *Comus* is the poem which does so the most. Literature has become so much lighter than it used to be, that we can scarcely realise the position it occupied in the light literature of our forefathers. We have now in our own language many poems that are pleasanter in their subject, more graceful in their execution, more flowing in their outline, more easy to read. Dr. Johnson, though perhaps no very excellent authority on the more intangible graces of literature, was disposed to deny to Milton the capacity of creating the lighter literature: 'Milton, madam, was a genius that could cut a colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones.' And it would not be surprising if this generation, which has access to the almost indefinite quantity of lighter compositions which have been produced since Johnson's time, were to echo his sentence. In some degree, perhaps, the

popular taste does so. *Comus* has no longer the peculiar exceptional popularity which it used to have. We can talk without general odium of its defects. Its characters are nothing, its sentiments are tedious, its story is not interesting. But it is only when we have realised the magnitude of its deficiencies that we comprehend the peculiarity of its greatness. Its power is in its style. A grave and firm music pervades it: it is soft, without a thought of weakness; harmonious and yet strong; impressive, as few such poems are, yet covered with a bloom of beauty and a complexity of charm that few poems have either. We have, perhaps, light literature in itself better, that we read oftener and more easily, that lingers more in our memories; but we have not any, we question if there ever will be any, which gives so true a conception of the capacity and the dignity of the mind by which it was produced. The breath of solemnity which hovers round the music attaches us to the writer. Every line, here as elsewhere, in Milton excites the idea of indefinite power.

And so we must draw to a close. The subject is an infinite one, and if we pursued it, we should lose ourselves in miscellaneous commentary, and run on far beyond the patience of our readers. What we have said has at least a defined intention. We have wished to state the impression which the character of Milton and the greatest of Milton's works are likely to produce on readers of the present generation—a generation, almost more than any other, different from his own.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*
(1862)

NOTHING is so transitory as second-class fame. The name of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is hardly now known to the great mass of ordinary English readers. A generation has arisen which has had time to forget her. Yet only a few years since, an allusion to the 'Lady Mary' would have been easily understood by every well-informed person; young ladies were enjoined to form their style upon hers; and no one could have anticipated that her letters would seem in 1862 as different from what a lady of rank would then write or publish as if they had been written in the times of paganism. The very change, however, of popular taste and popular morality gives these letters now a kind of interest. The farther and the more rapidly we have drifted from where we once lay, the more do we wish to learn what kind of port it was. We venture, therefore, to recommend the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as an instructive and profitable study, not indeed to the youngest of young ladies, but to those maturer persons of either sex 'who have taken all knowledge to be their province,' and who have commenced their readings in 'universality' by an assiduous perusal of Parisian fiction.

It is, we admit, true that these letters are not at the present day very agreeable reading. What our grandfathers and grandmothers thought of them it is not so easy to say. But it now seems clear that Lady Mary was that most miserable of miserable beings, an ambitious and wasted woman; that she brought a very cultivated intellect into a very cultivated society; that she gave to that society what it was most anxious

* *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.* Edited by her Great-grandson, Lord Wharncliffe. Third edition, with Additions and Corrections derived from the original Manuscripts, illustrative Notes, and a New Memoir. By W. Moy Thomas. In two volumes. London: Henry Bohn.

to receive, and received from it all which it had to bestow;—and yet that this all was to her as nothing. The high intellectual world of England has never been so compact, so visible in a certain sense, so enjoyable, as it was in her time. She had a mind to understand it, beauty to adorn it, and wit to amuse it; but she chose to pass great part of her life in exile, and returned at last to die at home among a new generation, whose name she hardly knew, and to whom she herself was but a spectacle and a wonder.

Lady Mary Pierrepont—for that was by birth her name—belonged to a family which had a traditional reputation for ability and cultivation. The *Memoirs of Lucy Hutchinson*—(almost the only legacy that remains to us from the first generation of refined Puritans, the only book, at any rate, which effectually brings home to us how different they were in taste and in temper from their more vulgar and feeble successors)—contains a curious panegyric on *wise William* Pierrepont, to whom the Parliamentary party resorted as an oracle of judgment, and whom Cromwell himself, if tradition may be trusted, at times condescended to consult and court. He did not, however, transmit much of his discretion to his grandson, Lady Mary's father. This nobleman, for he inherited from an elder branch of the family both the marquisate of Dorchester and the dukedom of Kingston, was a mere man 'about town,' as the homely phrase then went, who passed a long life of fashionable idleness interspersed with political intrigue, and who signalised his old age by marrying a young beauty of fewer years than his youngest daughter, who, as he very likely knew, cared nothing for him and much for another person. He had the 'grand air,' however, and he expected his children when he visited them, to kneel down immediately and ask his blessing, which, if his character was what is said, must have been *very* valuable. The only attention he ever (that we know of) bestowed upon Lady Mary was a sort of theatrical outrage, pleasant enough to her at the time, but scarcely in accordance with the educational theories in which we now believe. He was a member of the Kit-Cat, a great Whig club, the Brooks's of Queen Anne's time which, like Brooks's, appears not to have been purely political, but to have found time for occasional relaxation and for somewhat unbusiness-like discussions. They held annually a formal meeting to arrange the female

toasts for that year; and we are told that a whim seized her father to nominate Lady Mary, 'then not eight years old, a candidate; alleging that she was far prettier than any lady on their list. The other members demurred, because the rules of the club forbade them to elect a beauty whom they had never seen. "Then you shall see her," cried he; and in the gaiety of the moment sent orders home to have her finely dressed and brought to him at the tavern, where she was received with acclamations, her claim unanimously allowed, her health drunk by every one present, and her name engraved in due form upon a drinking-glass. The company consisting of some of the most eminent men in England, she went from the lap of one poet, or patriot, or statesman, to the arms of another, was feasted with sweetmeats, overwhelmed with caresses, and, what perhaps already pleased her better than either, heard her wit and beauty loudly extolled on every side. Pleasure, she said, was too poor a word to express her sensations; they amounted to ecstasy: never again, throughout her whole future life, did she pass so happy a day. Nor, indeed, could she; for the love of admiration, which this scene was calculated to excite or increase, could never again be so fully gratified; there is always some alloying ingredient in the cup, some drawback upon the triumphs, of grown people. Her father carried on the frolic, and, we may conclude, confirmed the taste, by having her picture painted for the club-room, that she might be enrolled a regular toast.' Perhaps some young ladies of more than eight years old would not much object to have lived in those times. Fathers may be wiser now than they were then, but they rarely make themselves so thoroughly agreeable to their children.

This stimulating education would leave a weak and vain girl still more vain and weak; but it had not that effect on Lady Mary. Vain she probably was, and her father's boastfulness perhaps made her vainer; but her vanity took an intellectual turn. She read vaguely and widely; she managed to acquire some knowledge—how much is not clear—of Greek and Latin, and certainly learned with sufficient thoroughness French and Italian. She used to say that she had the worst education in the world, and that it was only by the 'help of an uncommon memory and indefatigable labour' that she had acquired her remarkable attainments. Her father certainly seems

to have been capable of any degree of inattention and neglect; but we should not perhaps credit too entirely all the legends which an old lady recounted to her grandchildren of the intellectual difficulties of her youth.

She seems to have been encouraged by her grandmother, one of the celebrated Evelyn family, whose memory is thus enigmatically but still expressively enshrined in the diary of the author of *Sylva*:—'Under this date,' we are informed, 'of the 2d of July 1649, he records a day spent at Godstone, where Sir John' (this lady's father) 'was on a visit with his daughter;' and he adds, 'Mem. The prodigious memory of Sir John of Wilts's daughter, since married to Mr. W. Pierrepont.' The lady who was thus formidable in her youth deigned in her old age to write frequently, as we should now say,—to open a 'regular commerce' of letters, as was said in that age—with Lady Mary when quite a girl, which she always believed to have been beneficial to her, and probably believed rightly; for she was intelligent enough to comprehend what was said to her, and the old lady had watched many changes in many things.

Her greatest intellectual guide, at least so in after life she used to relate, was Mr. Wortley, whom she afterwards married. 'When I was young,' she said, 'I was a great admirer of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and that was one of the chief reasons that set me upon the thoughts of stealing the Latin language. Mr. Wortley was the only person to whom I communicated my design, and he encouraged me in it. I used to study five or six hours a day for two years in my father's library; and so got that language, whilst everybody else thought I was reading nothing but novels and romances.' She perused, however, some fiction also; for she possessed, till her death, the whole library of Mrs. Lennox's *Female Quixote*, a ponderous series of novels in folio, in one of which she had written, in her fairest youthful hand, the names and characteristic qualities of 'the beautiful Diana, the volatile Clemene, the melancholy Doris, Celadon the faithful, Adamas the wise, and so on, forming two columns.'

Of Mr. Wortley it is not difficult, from the materials before us, to decipher his character; he was a slow man, with a taste for quick companions. Swift's diary to Stella mentions an evening spent over a bottle of old wine with Mr. Wortley

and Mr. Addison. Mr. Wortley was a rigid Whig and Swift's transition to Toryism soon broke short that friendship. But with Addison he maintained an intimacy which lasted during their joint lives, and survived the marriages of both. With Steele likewise he was upon the closest terms, is said to have written some papers in the *Tatler* and *Spectator;* and the second volume of the former is certainly dedicated to him in affectionate and respectful terms.

Notwithstanding, however, these conspicuous testimonials to high ability, Mr. Wortley was an orderly and dull person. Every letter received by him from his wife during five-and-twenty years of absence, was found, at his death, carefully endorsed with the date of its arrival, and with a *synopsis* of its contents. 'He represented,' we are told, 'at various times, Huntingdon, Westminster, and Peterborough in Parliament, and appears to have been a member of that class who win respectful attention by sober and business-like qualities; and his name is constantly found in the drier and more formal part of the politics of the time.' He answered to the description given more recently of a similar person: 'Is not,' it was asked, 'Sir John —— a very methodical person?' 'Certainly he is,' was the reply, 'he files his invitations to dinner.' The Wortley papers, according to the description of those who have inspected them, seem to contain the accumulations of similar documents during many years. He hoarded money, however, to more purpose, for he died one of the richest commoners in England; and a considerable part of the now marvellous wealth of the Bute family seems at first to have been derived from him.

Whatever good qualities Addison and Steele discovered in Mr. Wortley, they were certainly not those of a good writer. We have from his pen and from that of Lady Mary a description of the state of English politics during the three first years of George III., and any one who wishes to understand how much readability depends upon good writing would do well to compare the two. Lady Mary's is a clear and bright description of all the superficial circumstances of the time; Mr. Wortley's is equally superficial, often unintelligible and always lumbering, and scarcely succeeds in telling us more than that the writer was wholly unsuccessful in all which he tried to do. As to Mr. Wortley's contributions to the periodicals of his time,

we may suspect that the jottings preserved at Loudon are all which he ever wrote of them, and that the style and arrangement were supplied by more skilful writers. Even a county member might furnish headings for the *Saturday Review*. He might say: 'Trent British vessel—Americans always intrusive—Support Government—Kill all that is necessary.'

What Lady Mary discovered in Mr. Wortley it is easier to say and shorter, for he was very handsome. If his portrait can be trusted, there was a placid and business-like repose about him, which might easily be attractive to a rather excitable and wild young lady, especially when combined with imposing features and a quiet sweet expression. He attended *to her* also. When she was a girl of fourteen, he met her at a party, and evinced his admiration. And a little while later, it is not difficult to fancy that a literary young lady might be much pleased with a good-looking gentleman not uncomfortably older than herself, yet having a place in the world, and well known to the literary men of the age. He was acquainted with the classics too, or was supposed to be so; and whether it was a consequence of or a preliminary to their affections, Lady Mary wished to know the classics also.

Bishop Burnet was so kind as to superintend the singular studies—for such they were clearly thought—of this aristocratic young lady; and the translation of the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, which he revised, is printed in this edition of her works. But even so grave an undertaking could not wholly withdraw her from more congenial pursuits. She commenced a correspondence with Miss Wortley, Mr. Wortley's unmarried sister, which still remains, though Miss Wortley's letters are hardly to be called hers, for her brother composed, and she merely copied them. The correspondence is scarcely in the sort of English or in the tone which young ladies, we understand, now use.

'It is as impossible,' says Miss Wortley, 'for my dearest Lady Mary to utter thought that can seem dull as to put on a look that is not beautiful. Want of wit is a fault that those who envy you most would not be able to find in your kind compliments. To me they seem perfect, since repeated assurances of your kindness forbid me to question their sincerity. You have often found that the most angry, nay, the most neglectful air you can assume, has made as deep a wound as the

kindest; and these lines of yours, that you tax with dulness (perhaps because they were writ when you was not in a right humour, or when your thoughts were elsewhere employed), are so far from deserving the imputation, that the very turn of your expression, had I forgot the rest of your charms, would be sufficient to make me lament the only fault you have—your inconstancy.'

To which the reply is:

'I am infinitely obliged to you, my dear Mrs. Wortley, for the wit, beauty, and other fine qualities, you so generously bestow upon me. Next to receiving them from Heaven, you are the person from whom I would choose to receive gifts and graces: I am very well satisfied to owe them to your own delicacy of imagination, which represents to you the idea of a fine lady, and you have good nature enough to fancy I am she. All this is mighty well, but you do not stop there; imagination is boundless. After giving me imaginary wit and beauty, you give me imaginary passions, and you tell me I'm in love: if I am, 'tis a perfect sin of ignorance, for I don't so much as know the man's name: I have been studying these three hours, and cannot guess who you mean. I passed the days of Nottingham races [at] Thoresby without seeing, or even wishing to see, one of the sex. Now, if I am in love, I have very hard fortune to conceal it so industriously from my own knowledge, and yet discover it so much to other people. 'Tis against all form to have such a passion as that, without giving one sigh for the matter. Pray tell me the name of him I love, that I may (according to the laudable custom of lovers) sigh to the woods and groves hereabouts, and teach it to the echo.'

After some time Miss Wortley unfortunately died, and there was an obvious difficulty in continuing the correspondence without the aid of an appropriate sisterly screen. Mr. Wortley seems to have been tranquil and condescending; perhaps he thought placid tactics would be most effective, for Lady Mary was not so calm. He sent her some *Tatlers,* and received, by way of thanks, the following tolerably encouraging letter:

'*To Mr. Wortley Montagu.*

'I am surprised at one of the *Tatlers* you send me; it is possible to have any sort of esteem for a person one believes

capable of having such trifling inclinations? Mr. Bickerstaff has very wrong notions of our sex. I can say there are some of us that despise charms of show, and all the pageantry of greatness, perhaps with more ease than any of the philosophers. In contemning the world, they seem to take pains to contemn it; we despise it, without taking the pains to read lessons of morality to make us do it. At least I know I have always looked upon it with contempt, without being at the expense of one serious reflection to oblige me to it. I carry the matter yet farther; was I to choose of two thousand pounds a year or twenty thousand, the first would be my choice. There is something of an unavoidable *embarras* in making what is called a great figure in the world; [it] takes off from the happiness of life; I hate the noise and hurry inseparable from great estates and titles, and look upon both as blessings that ought only to be given to fools, for 'tis only to them that they are blessings. The pretty fellows you speak of, I own entertain me sometimes; but it is impossible to be diverted with what one despises? I can laugh at a puppet-show; at the same time I know there is nothing in it worth my attention or regard. General notions are generally wrong. Ignorance and folly are thought the best foundations for virtue, as if not knowing what a good wife is was necessary to make one so. I confess that can never be my way of reasoning; as I always forgive an *injury* when I think it was not done out of malice, I can never think myself *obliged* by what is done without design. Give me leave to say it (I know it sounds vain), I know how to make a man of sense happy; but then that man must resolve to contribute something towards it himself. I have so much esteem for you, I should be very sorry to hear you was unhappy; but for the world I would not be the instrument of making you so; which (of the humour you are) is hardly to be avoided if I am your wife. You distrust me—I can neither be easy, nor loved, where I am distrusted. Nor do I believe your passion for me is what you pretend it; at least I am sure was I in love I could not talk as you do. Few women would have spoken so plainly as I have done; but to dissemble is among the things I never do. I take more pains to approve my conduct to myself than to the world; and would not have to accuse myself of a minute's deceit. I wish I loved you enough to devote myself to be for ever miserable, for the pleasure of a day or two's happiness. I cannot

resolve upon it. You must think otherwise of me, or not all.

'I don't enjoin you to burn this letter. I know you will. 'Tis the first I ever writ to one of your sex, and shall be the last. You must never expect another. I resolve against all correspondence of the kind; my resolutions are seldom made, and never broken.'

Mr. Wortley, however, still grumbled. He seems to have expected a young lady to do something even more decisive than ask him to marry her. He continued to hesitate and pause. The lady in the comedy says, 'What right has a man to intend unless he states his intentions?' and Lady Mary's biographers are entirely of that opinion. They think her exceedingly ill-used, and Mr. Wortley exceedingly to blame. And so it may have been; certainly a love-correspondence is rarely found where activity and intrepidity on the lady's side so much contrasts with quiescence and timidity on the gentleman's. If, however, we could summon him before us, probably Mr. Wortley would have something to answer on his own behalf. It is tolerably plain that he thought Lady Mary too excitable. 'Certainly,' he doubtless reasoned, 'she is a handsome young lady, and very witty; but beauty and wit are dangerous as well as attractive. Vivacity is delightful; but my esteemed friend Mr. Addison has observed that excessive quickness of parts is not unfrequently the cause of extreme rapidity in action. Lady Mary makes love to me before marriage, and I like it; but may she not make love also to some one else after marriage, and then I shall not like it.' Accordingly he writes to her timorously as to her love of pleasure, her love of romantic reading, her occasional toleration of younger gentlemen and quicker admirers. At last, however, he proposed; and as far as the lady was concerned, there was no objection.

We might have expected, from a superficial view of the facts, that there would have been no difficulty either on the side of the father. Mr. Wortley died one of the richest commoners in England; was of the first standing in society, of good family, and he had apparently, therefore, money to settle and station to offer to his bride. And he did offer both. He was ready to settle an ample sum on Lady Mary, both as his wife and as his widow, and was anxious that, if they married,

they should live in a manner suitable to her rank and his prospects. But nevertheless there was a difficulty. The *Tatler* had recently favoured its readers with dissertations upon social ethics not altogether dissimilar to those with which the *Saturday Review* frequently instructs its readers. One of these dissertations contained an elaborate exposure of the folly of settling your estate upon your unborn children. The arguments were of a sort very easily imaginable. 'Why,' it was said, 'should you give away that which you have to a person whom you do not know; whom you may never see; whom you may not like when you do see; who may be undutiful, unpleasant, or idiotic? Why, too, should each generation surrender its due control over the next? When the family estate is settled, men of the world know that the father's control is gone, for disinterested filial affection is an unfrequent though doubtless possible virtue; but so long as *property* is in suspense, all expectants will be attentive to those who have it in their power to give or not to give it.' These arguments had converted Mr. Wortley, who is said even to have contributed notes for the article, and they seem to have converted Lady Mary also. She was to have her money, and the most plain-spoken young ladies do not commonly care to argue much about the future provision for their possible children; the subject is always delicate and a little frightful, and, on the whole, must be left to themselves. But Lord Dorchester, her father, felt it his duty to be firm. It is an old saying, that 'you never know where a man's conscience may turn up,' and the advent of ethical feeling was in this case even unusually beyond calculation. Lord Dorchester had never been an anxious father, and was not now going to be a liberal father. He had never cared much about Lady Mary, except in so far as he could himself gain *éclat* by exhibiting her youthful beauty, and he was not now at her marriage about to do at all more than was necessary and decent in his station. It was not therefore apparently probable that he would be irritatingly obstinate respecting the income of his daughter's children. He was so, however. He deemed it a duty to see that '*his* grandchild never should be a beggar,' and, for what reason does not so clearly appear, wished that his eldest male grandchild should be immensely richer than all his other grandchildren. The old feudal aristocrat, often in modern Europe so curiously disguised in the indifferent

exterior of a careless man of the world, was, as became him, dictatorial and unalterable upon the duty of founding a family. Though he did not care much for his daughter, he cared much for the position of his daughter's eldest son. He had probably stumbled on the fundamental truth that 'girls were girls and boys were boys,' and was disinclined to disregard the rule of primogeniture by which he had obtained his marquisate, and from which he expected a dukedom.

Mr. Wortley, however, was through life a man, if eminent in nothing else, eminent at least in obstinacy. He would not give up the doctrine of the *Tatler* even to obtain Lady Mary. The match was accordingly abandoned, and Lord Dorchester looked out for and found another gentleman whom he proposed to make his son-in-law; for he believed, according to the old morality, 'that it was the duty of the parents to find a husband for a daughter, and that when he was found, it was the daughter's duty to marry him.' It was as wrong in her to attempt to choose as in him to neglect to seek. Lady Mary was, however, by no means disposed to accept this passive theory of female obligation. She *had* sought and chosen; and to her choice she intended to adhere. The conduct of Mr. Wortley would have offended some ladies, but it rather augmented her admiration. She had exactly that sort of irritable intellect which sets an undue value on new theories of society and morality, and is pleased when others do so too. She thought Mr. Wortley was quite right not to 'defraud himself for a possible infant,' and admired his constancy and firmness. She determined to risk a step, as she herself said, unjustifiable to her own relatives, but which she nevertheless believed that she could justify to herself. She decided on eloping with Mr. Wortley.

Before, however, taking this audacious leap, she looked a little. Though she did not object to the sacrifice of the customary inheritance of her contingent son, she by no means approved of sacrificing the settlement which Mr. Wortley had undertaken at a prior period of the negotiation to make upon herself. And according to common sense she was undoubtedly judicious. She was going from her father, and foregoing the money which he had promised her; and therefore it was not reasonable that, by going *to* her lover, she should forfeit also the money which *he* had promised her. And there is nothing

offensive in her mode of expression. ‘ ’Tis something odd for a woman that brings nothing to expect anything; but after the way of my education, I dare not pretend to live but in some degree suitable to it. I had rather die than return to a dependency upon relations I have disobliged. Save me from that fear, if you love me. If you cannot, or think I ought not to expect it, be sincere and tell me so. ’Tis better I should not be yours at all, than, for a short happiness, involve myself in ages of misery. I hope there will never be occasion for this precaution; but, however, ’tis necessary to make it.’ But true and rational as all this seems, perhaps it is still truer and still more rational to say, that if a woman has not sufficient confidence in her lover to elope with him without a previous promise of a good settlement, she had better not elope with him at all. After all, if he declines to make the stipulated settlement, the lady will have either to return to her friends or to marry without it, and she would have the full choice between these satisfactory alternatives, even if she asked no previous promise from her lover. At any rate, the intrusion of coarse money among the refined materials of romance is, in this case, even more curious and remarkable than usual.

After some unsuccessful attempts, Lady Mary and Mr. Wortley did elope and did marry, and, after a certain interval, of course, Lord Dorchester received them, notwithstanding their contempt of his authority, into some sort of favour and countenance. They had probably saved him money by their irregularity, and economical frailties are rarely judged severely by men of fashion who are benefited by them. Lady Mary, however, was long a little mistrusted by her own relations, and never seems to have acquired much family influence; but her marriage was not her only peculiarity, or the only one which impartial relations might dislike.

The pair appear to have been for a little while tolerably happy. Lady Mary was excitable, and wanted letters when absent, and attention when present: Mr. Wortley was heavy and slow; could not write letters when away, and seemed torpid in her society when at home. Still these are common troubles. Common, too, is the matrimonial correspondence upon baby’s deficiency in health, and on Mrs. Behn’s opinion that ‘ the cold bath is the best medicine for weak children.’ It seems an odd end to a deferential perusal of Latin authors in

girlhood, and to a spirited elopement with the preceptor in after years; but the transition is only part of the usual irony of human life.

The world, both social and political, into which Lady Mary was introduced by her marriage was singularly calculated to awaken the faculties, to stimulate the intellect, to sharpen the wit, and to harden the heart of an intelligent, witty, and hard-headed woman. The world of London—even the higher world—is now too large to be easily seen, or to be pithily described. The elements are so many, their position is so confused, the display of their mutual counteraction is so involved, that many years must pass away before even a very clever woman can thoroughly comprehend it all. She will cease to be young and handsome long ere she does comprehend it. And when she at last understands it, it does not seem a fit subject for concise and summary wit. Its evident complexity refuses to be condensed into pithy sayings and brilliant *bon-mots*. It has fallen into the hands of philosophers, with less brains perhaps than the satirists of our fathers, but with more anxiety to tell the whole truth, more toleration for the many-sidedness of the world, with less of sharp conciseness, but, perhaps, with more of useful completeness. As are the books, so are the readers. People do not wish to read satire nowadays. The epigrams even of Pope would fall dull and dead upon this serious and investigating time. The folly of the last age affected levity; the folly of this, as we all know, encases itself in ponderous volumes which defy refutation, in elaborate arguments which prove nothing, in theories which confuse the uninstructed, and which irritate the well-informed. The folly of a hundred years since was at least the folly of Vivien, but ours is the folly of Merlin:

> ' *You* read the book, my pretty Vivien,
> And none can read the text, not even I,
> And none can read the comments but myself—
> Oh, the results are simple ! '

Perhaps people did not know then as much as they know now: indisputably they knew nothing like so much in a superficial way *about* so many things; but they knew far more correctly where their knowledge began and where it stopped; what they thought and why they thought it: they had readier illustra-

tions and more summary phrases; they could say at once what it *came to*, and to what action it should lead.

The London of 1700 was an aristocratic world, which lived to itself, which displayed the virtues and developed the vices of an aristocracy which was under little fear of external control or check; which had emancipated itself from the control of the crown; which had not fallen under the control of the *bourgeoisie;* which saw its own life, and saw that, according to its own maxims, it was good. Public opinion now rules, and it is an opinion which constrains the conduct, and narrows the experience, and dwarfs the violence, and *minimises* the frankness of the highest classes, while it diminishes their vices, supports their conscience, and precludes their grossness. There was nothing like this in the last century, especially in the early part of it. The aristocracy came to town from their remote estates,—where they were uncontrolled by any opinion or by any equal society, and where the eccentricities and personalities of each character were fostered and exaggerated,—to a London which was like a large county town, in which everybody of rank knew everybody of rank, where the eccentricities of each rural potentate came into picturesque collision with the eccentricities of other rural potentates, where the most minute allusions to the peculiarities and the career of the principal persons were instantly understood, where squibs were on every table, and where satire was in the air. No finer field of social observation could be found for an intelligent and witty woman. Lady Mary understood it at once.

Nor was the political life of the last century so unfavourable to the influence and so opposed to the characteristic comprehension of women as our present life. We are now ruled by political discussion and by a popular assembly, by leading articles, and by the House of Commons. But women can scarcely ever compose leaders, and no woman sits in our representative chamber. The whole tide of abstract discussion which fills our mouths and deafens our ears, the whole complex accumulation of facts and figures to which we refer every thing, and which we apply to every thing, is quite unfemale. A lady has an insight into what she sees; but how will this help her with the case of the *Trent*, with the proper structure of a representative chamber, with Indian finance or parliamentary reform? Women are clever, but cleverness of itself is nothing at present. A

sharp Irish writer described himself 'as bothered intirely by the want of preliminary information;' women are in the same difficulty now. Their nature may hereafter change, as some sanguine advocates suggest. But the visible species certainly have not the intellectual providence to acquire the vast stores of dry information which alone can enable them to judge adequately of our present controversies. We are ruled by a machinery of oratory and discussion, in which women have no share, and which they hardly comprehend: we are engaged on subjects which need an arduous learning, to which they have no pretensions.

In the last century much of this was very different. The Court still counted for much in English politics. The House of Commons was the strongest power in the State machine, but it was not so immeasurably the strongest power as now. It was absolutely supreme within its sphere, but that sphere was limited. It could absolutely control the money, and thereby the policy of the State. Whether there should be peace or war, excise or no excise, it could and did despotically determine. It was supreme in its choice of *measures*. But, on the other hand, it had only a secondary influence in the choice of *persons*. Who the Prime Minister was to be, was a question not only theoretically determinable, but in fact determined by the Sovereign. The House of Commons could despotically impose two conditions: first, that the Prime Minister should be a man of sufficient natural ability, and sufficient parliamentary experience, to conduct the business of his day; secondly, that he should adopt the policy which the nation wished. But, subject to a conformity with these prerequisites, the selection of the king was nearly uncontrolled. Sir Robert Walpole was the greatest master of parliamentary tactics and political business in his generation; he was a statesman of wide views and consummate dexterity; but these intellectual gifts, even joined to immense parliamentary experience, were not alone sufficient to make him and to keep him Prime Minister of England. He also maintained, during two reigns, a complete system of court-strategy. During the reign of George II. he kept a *queen-watcher*. Lord Hervey, one of the cleverest men in England, the keenest observer, perhaps, in England, was induced, by very dexterous management, to remain at court during many years—to observe the queen, to

hint to the queen, to remove wrong impressions from the queen, to confirm the Walpolese predilections of the queen, to report every incident to Sir Robert. The records of politics tell us few stranger tales than that it should have been necessary for the Sir Robert Peel of the age to hire a subordinate as safe as Eldon, and as witty as Canning, for the sole purpose of managing a clever German woman, to whom the selection of a Prime Minister was practically intrusted. Nor was this the only court-campaign which Sir Robert had to conduct, or in which he was successful. Lady Mary, who hated him much, has satirically described the foundation upon which his court favour rested during the reign of George I.:—

'The new Court with all their train was arrived before I left the country. The Duke of Marlborough was returned in a sort of triumph, with the apparent merit of having suffered for his fidelity to the succession, and was reinstated in his office of general, &c. In short, all people who had suffered any hardship or disgrace during the late ministry, would have it believed that it was occasioned by their attachment to the House of Hanover. Even Mr. Walpole, who had been sent to the Tower for a piece of bribery proved upon him, was called a confessor to the cause. But he had another piece of good luck that yet more contributed to his advancement; he had a very handsome sister, whose folly had lost her reputation in London; but the yet greater folly of Lord Townshend, who happened to be a neighbour in Norfolk to Mr. Walpole, had occasioned his being drawn in to marry her some months before the queen died.

'Lord Townshend had that sort of understanding which commonly makes men honest in the first part of their lives; they follow the instructions of their tutor, and, till somebody thinks it worth their while to show them a new path, go regularly on in the road where they are set. Lord Townshend had then been many years an excellent husband to a sober wife, a kind master to all his servants and dependents, a serviceable relation wherever it was in his power, and followed the instinct of nature in being fond of his children. Such a sort of behaviour without any glaring absurdity, either in prodigality or avarice, always gains a man the reputation of reasonable and honest; and this was his character when the Earl of Godolphin sent him envoy to the States, not doubting but he would be faithful

to his orders, without giving himself the trouble of criticising on them, which is what all ministers wish in an envoy. Robotun, a French refugee (secretary to Bernstoff, one of the Elector of Hanover's ministers), happened then to be at the Hague, and was civilly received at Lord Townshend's, who treated him at his table with the English hospitality, and he was charmed with a reception which his birth and education did not entitle him to. Lord Townshend was recalled when the queen changed her ministry; his wife died, and he retired into the country, where (as I have said before) Walpole had art enough to make him marry his sister Dolly. At that time, I believe, he did not propose much more advantage by the match than to get rid of a girl that lay heavy on his hands.

'When King George ascended the throne, he was surrounded by all his German ministers and playfellows, male and female. Baron Goritz was the most considerable among them both for birth and fortune. He had managed the king's treasury thirty years with the utmost fidelity and economy; and had the true German honesty, being a plain, sincere, and unambitious man. Bernstoff the secretary was of a different turn. He was avaricious, artful, and designing; and had got his share in the king's councils by bribing his women. Robotun was employed in these matters, and had the sanguine ambition of a Frenchman. He resolved there should be an English ministry of his choosing; and knowing none of them personally but Townshend, he had not failed to recommend him to his master, and his master to the king, as the only proper person for the important post of Secretary of State; and he entered upon that office with universal applause, having at that time a very popular character, which he might possibly have retained for ever if he had not been entirely governed by his wife and her brother R. Walpole, whom he immediately advanced to be paymaster, esteemed a post of exceeding profit, and very necessary for his indebted estate.'

And it is indisputable that Lord Townshend, who thought he was a very great statesman, and who began as the patron of Sir Robert Walpole, nevertheless was only his Court-agent—the manager on his behalf of the king and of the king's mistresses.

We need not point out at length, for the passage we have cited of itself indicates how well suited this sort of politics is

to the comprehension and to the pen of a keen-sighted and witty woman.

Nor was the Court the principal improver of the London society of the age. The House of Commons was then a part of society. This separate, isolated, aristocratic world, of which we have spoken, had an almost undisputed command of both Houses in the Legislature. The letter of the constitution did not give it them, and no law appointed that it should be so. But the aristocratic class were by far the most educated, by far the most respected, by far the most *eligible* part of the nation. Even in the boroughs, where there was universal suffrage, or something near it, they were the favourites. Accordingly, they gave the tone to the House of Commons; they required the small community of members who did not belong to their order to conform as far as they could to their usages, and to guide themselves by their code of morality and of taste. In the main the House of Commons obeyed these injunctions, and it was repaid by being incorporated within the aristocratic world: it became not only the council of the nation, but the debating-club of fashion. That which was 'received' modified the recipient. The remains of the aristocratic society, wherever we find them, are penetrated not only with an aristocratic but with a political spirit. They breathe a sort of atmosphere of politics. In the London of the present day, the vast miscellaneous *bourgeois* London, we all know that this is not so. 'In the country,' said a splenetic observer, 'people talk politics; at London dinners you talk nothing; between two pillars of crinoline you eat and are resigned.' A hundred and fifty years ago, as far as our rather ample materials inform us, people in London talked politics just as they now talk politics in Worcestershire; and being on the spot, and cooped up with politicians in a small social world, their talk was commonly better. They knew the people of whom they spoke, even if they did not know the subjects with which they were concerned.

No element is better fitted to counteract the characteristic evil of an aristocratic society. The defect of such societies in all times has been frivolity. All talk has tended to become gossip; it has ceased to deal with important subjects, and has devoted itself entirely to unimportant incidents. Whether the Duc de —— has more or less prevailed with the Marquise

de —— is a sort of common form into which any details may be fitted, and any names inserted. The frivolities of gallantry —never very important save to some woman who has long been dead—fill the records of all aristocracies who lived under a despotism, who had no political authority, no daily political cares. The aristocracy of England in the last century were, at any rate, exempt from this reproach. There is in the records of it not only an intellectuality, which would prove little, for every clever describer, by the subtleties of his language and the arrangement of his composition, gives a sort of intellectuality even to matters which have no pretension to it themselves, but likewise a pervading medium of political discussion. The very language in which they are written is the language of political business. Horace Walpole was certainly by nature no politician and no orator; yet no discerning critic can read a page of his voluminous remains without feeling that the writer has through life lived with politicians and talked with politicians. A keen observant mind, not naturally political, but capable of comprehending and viewing any subject which was brought before it, has chanced to have this particular subject—politics—presented to it for a lifetime; and all its delineations, all its efforts, all its thoughts, reflect it, and are coloured by it. In all the records of the eighteenth century the tonic of business is seen to combat the relaxing effect of habitual luxury.

This element, too, is favourable to a clever woman. The more you can put before such a person the greater she will be: the less her world, the less she is. If you place the most keen-sighted lady in the midst of the pure futilities and unmitigated flirtations of an aristocracy, she will sink to the level of those elements, and will scarcely seem to wish for anything more, or to be competent for anything higher. But if she is placed in an intellectual atmosphere, in which political or other important subjects are currently passing, you will probably find that she can talk better upon them than you can, without your being able to explain whence she derived either her information or her talent.

The subjects, too, which were discussed in the political society of the last age were not so inscrutable to women as our present subjects; and even when there were great difficulties, they were more on a level with men in the discussion

of them than they now are. It was no disgrace to be destitute of preliminary information at a time in which there were no accumulated stores from which such information could be derived. A lightening element of female influence is therefore to be found through much of the politics of the eighteenth century.

Lady Mary entered easily into all this world, both social and political. She had beauty for the fashionable, satire for the witty, knowledge for the learned, and intelligence for the politician. She was not too refined to shrink from what we now consider the coarseness of that time. Many of her verses themselves are scarcely adapted for our decorous pages. Perhaps the following give no unfair idea of her ordinary state of mind:

'TOWN ECLOGUES.

ROXANA; OR, THE DRAWING-ROOM.

'Roxana, from the court retiring late,
Sigh'd her soft sorrows at St. James's gate.
Such heavy thoughts lay brooding in her breast,
Not her own chairmen with more weight oppress'd;
They groan the cruel load they're doom'd to bear;
She in these gentle sounds express'd her care.
"Was it for this that I these roses wear?
For this new-set the jewels for my hair?
Ah! Princess! with what zeal have I pursued!
Almost forgot the duty of a prude.
Thinking I never could attend too soon,
I've miss'd my prayers, to get me dress'd by noon.
For thee, ah! what for thee did I resign?
My pleasures, passions, all that e'er was mine.
I sacrific'd both modesty and ease,
Left operas and went to filthy plays;
Double-entendres shock my tender ear;
Yet even this for thee I choose to bear.
In glowing youth, when nature bids be gay,
And every joy of life before me lay,
By honour prompted, and by pride restrained,
The pleasures of the young my soul disdain'd:
Sermons I sought, and with a mien severe
Censur'd my neighbours, and said daily prayer.
"Alas! how chang'd—with the same sermon-mien

That once I pray'd, the *What d'ye call't* I've seen.
Ah! cruel Princess, for thy sake I've lost
That reputation which so dear had cost:
I, who avoided every public place,
When bloom and beauty bade me show my face,
Now near thee constant every night abide
With never-failing duty by thy side;
Myself and daughters standing on a row,
To all the foreigners a goodly show!
Oft had your drawing-room been sadly thin,
And merchants' wives close by the chair been seen,
Had not I amply filled the empty space,
And saved your highness from the dire disgrace.
" Yet Coquetilla's artifice prevails,
When all my merit and my duty fails;
That Coquetilla, whose deluding airs
Corrupt our virgins, still our youth ensnares;
So sunk her character, so lost her fame,
Scarce visited before your highness came:
Yet for the bed-chamber 'tis her you choose,
When zeal and fame and virtue you refuse.
Ah! worthy choice! not one of all your train
Whom censure blasts not, and dishonours stain!
Let the nice hind now suckle dirty pigs,
And the proud pea-hen hatch the cuckoo's eggs!
Let Iris leave her paint and own her age,
And grave Suffolka wed a giddy page!
A greater miracle is daily view'd,
A virtuous Princess with a court so lewd.
" I know thee, court! with all thy treach'rous wiles,
Thy false caresses and undoing smiles!
Ah! Princess, learn'd in all the courtly arts,
To cheat our hopes, and yet to gain our hearts!
" Large lovely bribes are the great statesman's aim;
And the neglected patriot follows fame.
The Prince is ogled; some the king pursue;
But your Roxana only follows you.
Despis'd Roxana, cease, and try to find
Some other, since the Princess proves unkind:
Perhaps it is not hard to find at court,
If not a greater, a more firm support." '

There was every kind of rumour as to Lady Mary's own conduct, and we have no means of saying whether any of these rumours were true. There is no evidence against her which is worthy of the name. So far as can be proved, she was simply a gay, witty, bold-spoken, handsome woman, who made many enemies by unscrupulous speech, and many friends by unscrupulous flirtation. We may believe, but we cannot prove, that she found her husband tedious, and was dissatisfied that his slow, methodical, *borné* mind made so little progress in the political world, and understood so little of what really passed there. Unquestionably she must have preferred talking to Lord Hervey to talking with Mr. Montagu. But we must not credit the idle scandals of a hundred years since, because they may have been true, or because they appear not inconsistent with the characters of those to whom they relate. There were legends against every attractive and fashionable woman in that age, and most of the legends were doubtless exaggerations and inventions. We cannot know the truth of such matters now, and it would hardly be worth searching into if we could; but the important fact is certain, Lady Mary lived in a world in which the worst rumours were greedily told and often believed about her and others; and the moral refinement of a woman must always be impaired by such a contact.

Lady Mary was so unfortunate as to incur the partial dislike of one of the greatest recorders of that age, and the bitter hostility of the other. She was no favourite with Horace Walpole, and the bitter enemy of Pope. The first is easily explicable. Horace Walpole never loved his father, but recompensed himself by hating his father's enemies. No one connected with the opposition to Sir Robert is spared by his son, if there be a fair opportunity for unfavourable insinuation. Mr. Wortley Montagu was the very man for a grave mistake. He made the very worst that could be made in that age. He joined the party of constitutional exiles on the Opposition bench, who had no real objection to the policy of Sir Robert Walpole; who, when they had a chance, adopted that policy themselves; who were discontented because they had no power, and he had all the power. Probably too, being a man eminently respectable, Mr. Montagu was frightened at Sir Robert's unscrupulous talk and not very scrupuolus actions. At any rate,

he opposed Sir Robert; and thence many a little observation of Horace Walpole's against Lady Mary.

Why Pope and Lady Mary quarrelled is a question on which much discussion has been expended, and on which a judicious German professor might even now compose an interesting and exhaustive monograph. A curt English critic will be more apt to ask, 'Why they should *not* have quarrelled?' We know that Pope quarrelled with almost every one; we know that Lady Mary quarrelled or half quarrelled with most of her acquaintances. Why, then, should they not have quarrelled with one another?

It is certain that they were very intimate at one time; for Pope wrote to her some of the most pompous letters of compliment in the language. And the more intimate they were to begin with, the more sure they were to be enemies in the end. Human nature will not endure that sort of proximity. An irritable vain poet, who always fancies that people are trying to hurt him, whom no argument could convince that every one is not perpetually thinking about him, cannot long be friendly with a witty woman of unscrupulous tongue, who spares no one, who could sacrifice a good friend for a bad *bon-mot*, who thinks of the person whom she is addressing, not of those about whom she is speaking. The natural relation of the two is that of victim and torturer, and no other will long continue. There appear also to have been some money matters (of all things in the world) between the two. Lady Mary was intrusted by Pope with some money to use in speculation during the highly fashionable panic which derives its name from the South-Sea Bubble,—and as of course it was lost, Pope was very angry. Another story goes, that Pope made serious love to Lady Mary, and that she laughed at him; upon which a very personal, and not always very correct, controversy has arisen as to the probability or improbability of Pope's exciting a lady's feelings. Lord Byron took part in it with his usual acuteness and incisiveness, and did not leave the discussion more decent than he found it. Pope doubtless was deformed, and had not the large red health that uncivilised women admire; yet a clever lady might have taken a fancy to him, for the little creature knew what he was saying. There is, however, no evidence that Lady Mary did so. We only know that there was a sudden coolness or quarrel between them, and that it was the beginning of a long and bitter hatred.

In their own times Pope's sensitive disposition probably gave Lady Mary a great advantage. Her tongue perhaps gave him more pain than his pen gave her. But in later times she has fared the worse. What between Pope's sarcasms and Horace Walpole's anecdotes, Lady Mary's reputation has suffered very considerably. As we have said, her offences are *non proven;* there is no evidence to convict her; but she is likely to be condemned upon the general doctrine that a person who is accused of much is probably guilty of something.

During many years, Lady Mary continued to live a distinguished fashionable and social life, with a single remarkable break. This interval was her journey to Constantinople. The powers that then were, thought fit to send Mr. Wortley as ambassador to Constantinople, and his wife accompanied him. During that visit she kept a journal, and wrote sundry real letters, out of which, after her return, she composed a series of unreal letters as to all she saw and did in Turkey, and on the journey there and back, which were published, and which are still amusing, if not always select, reading. The Sultan was not then the 'dying man'; he was the 'Grand Turk.' He was not simply a potentate to be counted with, but a power to be feared. The appearance of a Turkish army on the Danube had in that age much the same effect as the appearance of a Russian army now. It was an object of terror and dread. A mission at Constantinople was not then a *bureau* for interference in Turkey; but a serious office for transacting business with a great European power. A European ambassador at Constantinople now presses on the Government there impracticable reforms; he then asked for useful aid. Lady Mary was evidently impressed by the power of the country in which she sojourned; and we observe in her letters evident traces of the notion, that the Turk was the dread of Christendom,—which is singular now, when the Turk is its *protégé*.

Lady Mary had another advantage too. Many sorts of books make steady progress; a scientific treatise published now is sure to be fuller and better than one on the same subject written long ago. But with books of travel in a stationary country the presumption is the contrary. In that case the old book is probably the better book. The first traveller writes out a plain straightforward description of the most striking objects with which he meets; he believes that his readers know nothing

of the country of which he is writing, for till he visited it he probably knew nothing himself; and, if he is sensible, he describes simply and clearly all which most impresses him. He has no motive for not dwelling upon the principal things, and most likely will do so, as they are probably the most conspicuous. The second traveller is not so fortunate. He is always in terror of the traveller who went before. He fears the criticism,—'this is all very well, *but* we knew the whole of it before. No. 1 said that at page 103.' In consequence, he is timid. He picks and skips. He fancies that you are acquainted with all which is great and important, and he dwells, for your good and to your pain, upon that which is small and unimportant. For ordinary readers no result can be more fatal. They perhaps never read,—they certainly do not remember anything upon the subject. The curious *minutiæ*, so elaborately set forth, are quite useless, for they have not the general framework in which to store them. Not knowing much of the first traveller's work, that of the second is a supplement to a treatise with which they are unacquainted. In consequence they do not read it. Lady Mary made good use of her position in the front of the herd of tourists. She told us what she saw in Turkey,—all the best of what she saw, and all the most remarkable things,—and told it very well.

Nor was this work the only fruit of her Turkish travels; she brought home the notion of inoculation. Like most improvers, she was roughly spoken to. Medical men were angry because the practice was not in their books, and conservative men were cross at the agony of a new idea. Religious people considered it wicked to have a disease which Providence did not think fit to send you; and simple people 'did not like to make themselves ill of their own accord.' She triumphed, however, over all obstacles; inoculation, being really found to lengthen life and save complexions, before long became general.

One of the first patients upon whom Lady Mary tried the novelty was her own son, and many considerate people thought it 'worthy of observation' that he turned out a scamp. When he ran away from school, the mark of inoculation, then rare, was used to describe him, and after he was recovered, he never did anything which was good. His case seems to have been the common one in which nature (as we speak) requites herself for the strongheadedness of several generations by the weakness

of one. His father's and his mother's family had been rather able for some generations; the latter remarkably so. But this boy had always a sort of practical imbecility. He was not stupid, but he never did anything right. He exemplified another curious trait of nature's practice. Mr. Montagu was obstinate, though sensible; Lady Mary was flighty, though clever. Nature combined the defects. Young Edward Montagu was both obstinate and flighty. The only pleasure he can ever have given his parents was the pleasure of *feeling* their own wisdom. He showed that they were right before marriage in not settling the paternal property upon him, for he ran through every shilling he possessed. He was not sensible enough to keep his property, and just not fool enough for the law to take it for him.

After her return from Constantinople, Lady Mary continued to lead the same half-gay and half-literary life as before; but at last she did not like it. Various ingenious inquirers into antiquated minutiæ have endeavoured, without success, to discover reasons of detail which might explain her dissatisfaction. They have suggested that some irregular love-affair was unprosperous, and hinted that she and her husband were not on good terms. The love-affair, however, when looked for, cannot be found; and though she and her husband would appear to have been but distantly related, they never had any great quarrel which we know of. Neither seems to have been fitted to give the other much pleasure, and each had the fault of which the other was most impatient. Before marriage Lady Mary had charmed Mr. Montagu, but she had also frightened him; after marriage she frightened, but did not charm him. He was formal and composed; she was flighty and *outrée*. 'What *will* she do next?' was doubtless the poor man's daily feeling; and 'will he ever do anything?' was probably also hers. Torpid business, which is always going on, but which never seems to come to anything, is simply aggravating to a clever woman. Even the least impatient lady can hardly endure a perpetual process for which there is little visible and nothing theatrical to show; and Lady Mary was by no means the least impatient. But there was no abrupt quarrel between the two; and a husband and wife who have lived together more than twenty years can generally manage to continue to live together during a second twenty years. These reasons of detail

are scarcely the reasons for Lady Mary's wishing to break away from the life to which she had so long been used. Yet there was clearly some reason, for Lady Mary went abroad, and stayed there during many years.

We believe that the cause was not special and peculiar to the case, but general, and due to the invariable principles of human nature, at all times and everywhere. If historical experience proves anything, it proves that the earth is not adapted for a life of mere intellectual pleasure. The life of a brute on earth, though bad, is possible. It is not even difficult to many persons to destroy the higher part of their nature by a continual excess in sensual pleasure. It is even more easy and possible to dull all the soul and most of the mind by a vapid accumulation of torpid comfort. Many of the middle classes spend their whole lives in a constant series of petty pleasures, and an undeviating pursuit of small material objects. The gross pursuit of pleasure, and the tiresome pursuit of petty comfort, are quite suitable to such 'a being as man in such a world as the present one.' What is not possible is, to combine the pursuit of pleasure and the enjoyment of comfort with the characteristic pleasures of a strong mind. If you wish for luxury, you must not nourish the inquisitive instinct. The great problems of human life are in the air; they are without us in the life we see, within us in the life we feel. A quick intellect feels them in a moment. It says, 'Why am I here? What is pleasure, that I desire it? What is comfort, that I seek it? What are carpets and tables? What is the lust of the eye? What is the pride of life, that they should satisfy *me?* I was not made for such things. I hate them, because I have liked them; I loathe them, because it seems that there is nothing else for me.' An impatient woman's intellect comes to this point in a moment; it says, 'Society is good, but I have seen society. What is the use of talking, or hearing *bon-mots?* I have done both till I am tired of doing either. I have laughed till I have no wish to laugh again, and made others laugh till I have hated them for being such fools. As for instruction, I have seen the men of genius of my time; and they tell me nothing, —nothing of what I want to know. They are choked with intellectual frivolities. They cannot say "whence I came, and whither I go." What do they know of themselves? It is not from literary people that we can learn anything; more likely,

they will copy, or try to copy, the manners of lords, and make ugly love, in bad imitation of those who despise them.' Lady Mary felt this, as we believe. She had seen all the world of England, and it did not *satisfy*. She turned abroad, not in pursuit of definite good, nor from fear of particular evil, but from a vague wish for some great change—from a wish to escape from a life which harassed the soul, but did not calm it; which awakened the intellect without answering its questions.

She lived abroad for more than twenty years, at Avignon and Venice and elsewhere; and during that absence, she wrote the letters which compose the greater part of her works. And there is no denying that they are good letters. The art of note-writing may become classical,—it is for the present age to provide models of that sort of composition,—but letters have perished. Nobody but a bore now takes pains enough to make them pleasant; and the only result of a bore's pains is to make them unpleasant. The correspondence of the present day is a continual labour without any visible achievement. The dying penny-a-liner said, with emphasis, 'That which I have written has perished.' We might all say so of the mass of petty letters we write. They are a heap of small atoms, each with some interest individually, but with no interest as a whole; all the items concern us, but they all add up to nothing. In the last century, cultivated people who sat down to write a letter took pains to have something to say, and took pains to say it. The postage was perhaps ninepence; and it would be impudent to make a correspondent pay ninepence for nothing. Still more impudent was it, *after* having made him pay ninepence, to give him the additional pain of making out what was half expressed. People, too, wrote to one another then, not unfrequently, who had long been separated, and who required much explanation and many details to make the life of each intelligible to the other. The correspondence of the nineteenth century is like a series of telegrams with amplified headings. There is not more than one idea; and that idea comes soon, and is soon over. The best correspondence of the last age is rather like a good light article,—in which the points are studiously made,—in which the effort to make them is studiously concealed,—in which a series of selected circumstances is set forth,—in which you feel, but are not told, that

the principle of the writer's selection was to make his composition pleasant.

In letter-writing of this kind Lady Mary was very skilful. She has the highest merit of letter-writing—she is concise without being affected. Fluency, which a great orator pronounced to be the curse of orators, is at least equally the curse of writers. There are many people, many ladies especially, who can write letters at any length, in any number, and at any time. We may be quite sure that the letters so written are not good letters. Composition of any sort implies consideration; you must see where you are going before you can go straight, or can pick your steps as you go. On the other hand, too, much consideration is unfavourable to the ease of letter-writing, and perhaps of all writing. A letter too much studied wants flow; it is a museum of hoarded sentences. Each sentence sounds effective; but the whole composition wants vitality. It was written with the memory instead of the mind; and every reader feels the effect, though only the critical reader can detect the cause. Lady Mary understood all this. She said what she had to say in words that were always graphic and always sufficiently good, but she avoided curious felicity. Her expressions seem choice, but not chosen.

At the end of her life Lady Mary pointed a subordinate but not a useless moral. The masters of mundane ethics 'observe that you should stay in the world, or stay out of the world.' Lady Mary did neither. She went out, and tried to return. Horace Walpole thus describes the result: 'Lady Mary Wortley is arrived; I have seen her; I think her avarice, her art, and her vivacity are all increased. Her dress, like her language, is a *galimatias* of several countries; the groundwork rags, and the embroidery nastiness. She needs no cap, no handkerchief, no gown, no petticoat, and no shoes. An old black laced hood represents the first; the fur of a horseman's coat, which replaces the third, serves for the second; a dimity petticoat is deputy and officiates for the fourth; and slippers act the part of the last. When I was at Florence, and she was expected there, we were drawing *sortes Virgilianas* for her; we literally drew

"Insanam vatem aspicies"

It would have been a stranger prophecy now even than it was

then.' There is a description of what the favourite of society becomes after leaving it for years, and after indulging eccentricities for years! There is a commentary on the blunder of exposing yourself in your old age to young people, to whom you have always been a tradition and a name! Horace Walpole doubtless painted up a few trivialities a little. But one of the traits is true. Lady Mary lived before the age in which people waste half their lives in washing the whole of their persons.

Lady Mary did not live long after her return to England. Horace Walpole's letter is written on the 2nd February 1809, and she died on the 21st August in the same year. Her husband had died just before her return, and perhaps, after so many years, she would not have returned unless he had done so. *Requiescat in pace;* for she quarrelled all her life.

William Cowper*
(1855)

For the English, after all, the best literature is the English. We understand the language; the manners are familiar to us; the scene at home: the associations our own. Of course, a man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea. But we cannot be always seeing the ocean. Its face is always large; its smile is bright; the ever-sounding shore sounds on. But we have no property in them. We stop and gaze; we pause and draw our breath; we look and wonder at the grandeur of the other world. But we live on shore. We fancy associations of unknown things and distant climes, of strange men and strange manners. But we are ourselves. Foreigners do not behave as we should, nor do the Greeks. What a strength of imagination, what a long practice, what a facility in the details of fancy is required to picture their past and unknown world! They are deceased. They are said to be immortal, because they have written a good epitaph; but they are gone. Their life and their manners have passed away. We read with interest in the catalogue of the ships—

> 'The men of Argos and Tyrintha next,
> And of Hermione, that stands retired
> With Asine, within her spacious bay;
> Of Epidaurus, crowned with purple vines,
> And of Træzena, with the Achaian youth
> Of sea-begirt Ægina, and with thine

**Poetical Works of William Cowper.* Edited by Robert Bell. J. W. Parker and Son.

The Life of William Cowper, with Selections from his Correspondence. Being Volume I. of the Library of Christian Biography, superintended by the Rev. Robert Bickersteth. Seeley, Jackson, and Co.

Maseta, and the dwellers on thy coast,
Waveworn Eïonæ; . . . . . .
And from Caristus and from Styra came
Their warlike multitudes, in front of whom
Elphenor marched, Calchodon's mighty son.
With foreheads shorn and wavy locks behind,
They followed, and alike were eager all
To split the hauberk with the shortened spear.'

But they are dead. ' "So am not I," said the foolish fat scullion.' We are the English of the present day. We have cows and calves, corn and cotton; we hate the Russians; we know where the Crimea is; we believe in Manchester the great. A large expanse is around us; a fertile land of corn and orchards, and pleasant hedgerows, and rising trees, and noble prospects, and large black woods, and old church towers. The din of great cities comes mellowed from afar. The green fields, the half-hidden hamlets, the gentle leaves, soothe us with ' a sweet inland murmur.' We have before us a vast seat of interest, and toil, and beauty, and power, and this our own. Here is our home. The use of foreign literature is like the use of foreign travel. It imprints in early and susceptible years a deep impression of great, and strange, and noble objects; but we cannot live with these. They do not resemble our familiar life; they do not bind themselves to our intimate affection; they are picturesque and striking, like strangers and wayfarers, but they are not of our home, or homely; they cannot speak to our ' business and bosoms '; they cannot touch the hearth of the soul. It would be better to have no outlandish literature in the mind than to have it the principal thing. We should be like accomplished vagabonds without a country, like men with a hundred acquaintances and no friends. We need an intellectual possession analogous to our own life; which reflects, embodies, improves it; on which we can repose; which will recur to us in the placid moments—which will be a latent principle even in the acute crises of our life. Let us be thankful if our researches in foreign literature enable us, as rightly used they will enable us, better to comprehend our own. Let us venerate what is old, and marvel at what is far. Let us read our own books. Let us understand ourselves.

With these principles, if such they may be called, in our

minds, we gladly devote these early pages of our journal to the new edition of Cowper, with which Mr. Bell has favoured us. There is no writer more exclusively English. There is no one—or hardly one perhaps—whose excellences are more natural to our soil, and seem so little able to bear transplantation. We do not remember to have seen his name in any continental book. Professed histories of English literature, we dare say, name him; but we cannot recall any such familiar and cursory mention as would evince a real knowledge and hearty appreciation of his writings.

The edition itself is a good one. The life of Cowper, which is prefixed to it, though not striking, is sensible. The notes are clear, explanatory, and so far as we know, accurate. The special introductions to each of the poems are short and judicious, and bring to the mind at the proper moment the passages in Cowper's letters most clearly relating to the work in hand. The typography is not very elegant, but it is plain and business-like. There is no affectation of cheap ornament.

The little book which stands second on our list belongs to a class of narratives written for a peculiar public, inculcating peculiar doctrines, and adapted, at least in part, to a peculiar taste. We dissent from a good deal of these tenets, and believe that they derive no support, but rather the contrary from the life of Cowper. In previous publications, written for the same persons, these opinions have been applied to that melancholy story in a manner which it requires strong writing to describe. In this little volume they are more rarely expressed, and when they are it is with diffidence, tact, and judgment.

It would be only a very pedantic critic who would attempt to separate the criticism on Cowper's works very widely from a narrative or outline of his life. Indeed, such an attempt would be scarcely intelligible. Cowper's poems are almost as much connected with his personal circumstances as his letters, and his letters are as purely autobiographical as those of any man well can be. If all other information as to Cowper had perished save what his poems contain, the attention of the critics would be diverted from the special examination of their interior characteristics to a conjectural dissertation on the personal fortunes of the author. The Germans would have much to say. It would be debated in Tübingen who were the three hares,

why 'The Sofa' was written, why John Gilpin was not called William. Halle would show with great clearness that there was no reason why he *should* be called William; that it appeared by the bills of mortality that several other persons born about the same period had also been called John; and the ablest of all the professors would finish the subject with a monograph showing that there was a special fitness in the name John, and that any one with the æsthetic sense who (like the professor) had devoted many years exclusively to the perusal of the poem, would be certain that any other name would be quite 'paralogistic, and in every manner impossible and inappropriate.' It would take a German to write upon the hares.

William Cowper, the poet, was born on the 26th November, 1731, at his father's parsonage, at Berkhampstead. Of his father, who was chaplain to the king, we know nothing of importance. Of his mother, who had been named 'Donne,' and was a Norfolk lady, he has often made mention, and it appears that he regarded the faint recollection which he retained of her—for she died early—with peculiar tenderness. In later life, and when his sun was going down in gloom and sorrow, he recurred eagerly to opportunities of intimacy with her most distant relatives, and clearly wished to keep alive the idea of her in his mind. That idea was not of course very definite; indeed, as described in his poems, it is rather the abstract idea of what a mother should be than anything else; but he was able to recognise her picture, and there is a suggestion of cakes and sugar-plums, which gives a life and vividness to the rest. Soon after her death he was sent to a school, kept by a man named Pitman, at which he always described himself as having suffered exceedingly from the cruelty of one of the boys. He could never see him, or think of him, he has told us, without trembling. And there must have been some solid reason for this terror, since—even in those days, when τύπτω meant I strike, and boy denoted a thing to be beaten—this juvenile inflicter of secret stripes was actually expelled. Next, Cowper, having shown symptoms of a weakness in the eyes, which remained with him through life, was consigned to the care of an oculist,—a dreadful fate for even the most cheerful boy, and certainly not likely to cure one with any disposition to melancholy. Hardly, indeed, could the boldest mind, in its toughest hour of manly fortitude, endure to be

domesticated with an operation chair. Thence he was transferred to Westminster, of which he has left us somewhat contradictory notices, according to the feeling for the time being uppermost in his mind. From several parts of the 'Tirocinum,' or 'Review of Schools,' it would certainly seem that he regarded the whole system of public school teaching, not only with speculative disapproval, but with the painful hatred of a painful experience. A thousand genial passages in his private letters, however, really prove the contrary; and in a changing mood of mind, the very poem which was avowedly written to 'recommend private tuition at home' gives some idea of school happiness.

'Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the play-place of our earth days;
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still,
The bench on which we sat while deep employed,
Though mangled, hacked, and hewed, not yet
destroyed;
The little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw;
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollections of our own delights,
That viewing it, we seem almost to obtain
Our innocent sweet simple years again.
This fond attachment to the well-known place
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it even in age, and at our latest day.'

It is probably an insoluble problem to seek a suitable education for a morbidly melancholy mind. At first it seems a dreadful thing to place a gentle and sensitive nature in contact, in familiarity, and even under the rule of coarse and strong buoyant natures. Nor, in truth, should it be in general

attempted. The certain result is present suffering, and the expected good is remote and disputable. Nevertheless, it is no artificial difficulty which we here encounter—none which we can hope by educational contrivances to meet or vanquish. The difficulty is in truth the existence of the world. It is the fact, that according to the constitution of the external world, the strong, the bold, the vigorous, and the buoyant, rise and rule; and that the weak, the shrinking, and the timid, fall and serve. In after-life, in the actual commerce of men, even too in those pursuits in which from their quiet and tranquil nature, a still and gentle mind should seem to be under the least disadvantage, in philosophy and speculation, the strong and active, who have confidence in themselves and in their resolutions and their ideas, attain and retain dominion. It is idle to expect that this will not give great pain—that the shrinking and timid, who are often just as ambitious as others, will not repine—that the rough and strong will not often conscientiously inflict grievous oppression—will not still more often, without knowing it, cause to more tremulous minds a refined suffering which their coarser texture could never experience, which it does not sympathise with, or comprehend. Some time in life—it is but a question of a very few years at most—this trial must be undergone. There may be a short time, more or less, of gentle protection and affectionate care, but the leveret grows old—the world waits at the gate—the hounds are ready, and the huntsman too, and there is need of strength, and pluck, and speed. Cowper, indeed, himself, as we have remarked, on an attentive examination, does not seem to have really suffered particularly. In after years, as has also been said, when a dark cloud had passed over him, he certainly did seem at times to exaggerate isolated days of melancholy and suffering, and fancy that the dislike which he entertained for the system of schools, by way of speculative principle, was in fact the result of a personal and painful experience. But, as we shall have (though we shall not, in fact, perhaps use them all) a thousand occasions to observe, he had, side by side with a morbid and melancholy humour, an easy nature, which was easily satisfied with the world as he found it, had a pleasure in the gaiety of others, and liked the sight of, and sympathy with, the more active enjoyments which he did not care to engage in or to share. Besides, there is every evidence that cricket and

marbles (though he sometimes in his narratives suppresses the fact in condescension to his evangelical associates who believe them to be the idols of wood and stone which are spoken of in the prophets) really exercised a laudable and healthy supremacy over his mind. The animation of the scene—the gay alertness which Gray looked back on so fondly in long years of soothing and delicate musing, exerted, as the passage which we cited shows, a great influence over a mind superior to Gray's in facility and freedom, though inferior in the 'little footsteps' of the finest fancy,—in the rare and carefully-hoarded felicities, which are only equalled in the immeasurable abundance of the greatest of all writers. Of course Cowper was unhappy at school as he was unhappy always; and of course too, we are speaking of Westminster only. For Dr. Pitman and the oculist there is nothing to say.

In scholarship Cowper seems to have succeeded. He was not, indeed, at all the sort of man to attain to that bold, strong-brained, confident scholarship which Bentley carried to such an extreme, and which, in almost every generation since, some Englishman has been found of hard head and stiff-clayed memory to keep up and perpetuate. His friend Thurlow was the man for this pursuit, and the man to prolong the just notion that those who attain early proficiency in it are likely men to become Lord Chancellors. Cowper's scholarship was simply the general and delicate *impression* which the early study of the classics insensibly leaves on a nice and susceptible mind. In point of information it was strictly of a common nature. It is clear that his real knowledge was mostly confined to the poets, especially the ordinary Latin poets and Homer, and that he never bestowed any regular attention on the historians, or orators, or philosophers of antiquity, either at school or in after years. Nor indeed would such a course of study have in reality been very beneficial to him. The strong analytic, comprehensive, reason-giving powers which are required in these dry and rational pursuits were utterly foreign to his mind. All that was congenial to him, he acquired in the easy intervals of apparent idleness. The friends whom he made at Westminster, and who continued for many years to be attached to him, preserved the probable tradition that he was a gentle and gradual, rather than a forcible or rigorous learner.

The last hundred years have doubtless seen a vast change in

the common education of the common boy. The small and pomivorous animal which we so call is now subjected to a treatment very elaborate and careful,—that contrasts much with the simple alternation of classics and cuffs which was formerly so fashionable. But it may be doubted whether for a peculiar mind such as Cowper's, on the intellectual side at least, the tolerant and corporeal theory of the last century was not preferable to the intolerant and unresting moral influence that has succeeded to it. Some minds learn most when they seem to learn least. A certain, placid, unconscious, equable in-taking of knowledge suits them, and alone suits them. To attempt to force such men to attain great learning is simply impossible. You cannot put the fawn into the 'Land Transport.' The only resource is to allow them to acquire gently and casually in their own way; and in that way they will often imbibe, as if by the mere force of existence, much pleasant and well-fancied knowledge.

From Westminster Cowper went at once into a solicitor's office. Of the next few years (he was then about eighteen) we do not know much. His attention to legal pursuits was, accaccording to his own account, not very profound; yet it could not have been wholly contemptible, for his evangelical friend, Mr. Newton, who, whatever may be the worth of his religious theories, had certainly a sound, rough judgment on topics terrestrial, used in after years to have no mean opinion of the value of his legal counsel. In truth, though nothing could be more out of Cowper's way than abstract and recondite jurisprudence, an easy and sensible mind like his would find a great deal which was very congenial to it in the well known and perfectly settled maxims which regulate and rule the daily life of common men. No strain of capacity or stress of speculative intellect is necessary for the apprehension of these. A fair and easy mind, which is placed within their reach, will find it knows them, without knowing when or how.

After some years of legal instruction, Cowper chose to be called to the bar, and took chambers in the Temple accordingly. He never, however, even pretended to practise. He passed his time in literary society, in light study, in tranquil negligence. He was intimate with Colman, Lloyd, and other wits of those times. He wrote an essay in the Connoisseur, the kind of composition then most fashionable, especially with these literary

gentlemen who were most careful not to be confounded with the professed authors. In a word, he did ' nothing,' as that word is understood among the vigorous, aspiring, and trenchant part of mankind. Nobody could seem less likely to attain eminence. Every one must have agreed, that there was no harm in him, and few could have named any particular good which it was likely that he would achieve. In after days he drew up a memoir of his life, in which he speaks of those years with deep self-reproach. It was not indeed the secular indolence of the time which excited his disapproval. The course of life had not made him more desirous of worldly honours, but less; and nothing could be further from his tone of feeling than regret for not having strenuously striven to attain them. He spoke of those years in a Puritan manner, using words which literally express the grossest kind of active Atheism in a vague and vacant way; leaving us to gather from external sources whether they are meant to be understood in their common, plain, and human signification, or in that non-natural and technical sense in which they can scarcely have a meaning. It is evident that the regrets of Cowper had reference to offences which the healthy and sober consciences of mankind will not consider to deserve them. A vague, literary omnitolerant idleness was perhaps their worst feature. He was himself obliged to own that he had always been considered ' as one religiously inclined, if not actually religious,' and the applicable testimony, as well as the whole form and nature of his character, forbid us to ascribe to him the slightest act of licence or grossness. A reverend biographer has called his life at this time, ' an unhappy compound of guilt and wretchedness.' But unless the estimable gentleman thinks it sinful to be a barrister and wretched to live in the Temple, it is not easy to make out what he would mean. In point of intellectual cultivation, and with a view to preparing himself for writing his subsequent works, it is not possible he should have spent his time better. He then acquired that easy, familiar knowledge of terrestrial things —the vague and general information of the superficies of all existence—the acquaintance with life, business, hubbub and rustling matter of fact, which seem odd in the recluse of Olney —and enliven so effectually the cucumbers of the ' Task.' It has been said that at times every man wishes to be a man of the world, and even the most rigid critic must concede it to be

nearly essential to a writer on real life and actual manners. If a man has not seen his brother, how can he describe him? As this world calls happiness and blamelessness—it is not easy to fancy a life more happy—at least with more of the common elements of happiness,—or more blameless than those years of Cowper. An easy temper, light fancies, hardly as yet broken by shades of melancholy brooding; an enjoying habit, rich humour, literary, but not pedantic companions; a large scene of life and observation, polished acquaintance and attached friends, are pleasing and elegant pictures. A rough hero Cowper was not and never became, but he was then, as ever, a quiet and tranquil gentleman. If De Béranger's doctrine were true, '*Le bonheur tient au savoir-vivre*,' there were the materials of existence here. What, indeed, would not De Béranger have made of them?

One not unnatural result or accompaniment of such a life was that Cowper fell in love. There were in those days, two young ladies, cousins of Cowper, residents in London, to one of whom, the Lady Hesketh of after years, he once wrote:—'My dear Cousin,—I wonder how it happened, that much as I love you, I was never in love with you.' No similar kind providence protected his intimacy with her sister, Theodora Cowper. 'One of the cousins with whom Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton-row,' was a handsome and vigorous damsel. 'What!' said her father, 'What will you do if you marry William Cowper?' meaning, in the true parental spirit, to intrude mere arithmetical and financial ideas. 'Do, sir!' she replied, 'Wash all day, and ride out on the great dog all night!'—which is a spirited combination of domestic industry and exterior excitement. It is doubtful, however, whether either of these species of pastime and occupation would have been exactly congenial to Cowper. A gentle and refined indolence would always have made him a very inferior washerman, and perhaps to accompany the canine excursions of a wife 'which clear-starched,' would have hardly seemed enough to satisfy his accomplished and placid ambition. At any rate it certainly does seem that he was not a very vigorous lover. The young lady was, as he himself oddly said:—

'Through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fixed in her choice and faithful . . . *but in vain*.'

The poet does indeed partly allude to the parental scruples of Mr. Cowper, her father; but house-rent would not be so high as it is if fathers had their way. The profits of builders are eminently dependent on the uncontrollable nature of the best affections, and that very intelligent class of men have had a table compiled from the most trustworthy data, in which the chances of parental victory are rated at .0000000001, and those of the young people themseves at .999999999,—in fact, as many nines as you can imagine. 'It has been represented to me,' says the actuary, 'that few people ever marry without some objection, more or less slight, on the part of their parents; and from a most laborious calculation, from data collected in quarters both within and exterior to the bills of mortality, I am led to believe that the above figures represent the state of the case accurately enough to form a safe guide for the pecuniary investments of the gentlemen, &c., &c.' It is not likely that Theodora Cowper understood decimals, but she had a strong opinion in favour of her cousin, and a great idea, if we rightly read the now obscure annals of old times, that her father's objections might pretty easily have been got over. In fact, we think so even now, without any prejudice of affection, in our cool and mature judgment. Mr. Cowper the aged had nothing to say, except that the parties were cousins—a valuable remark, which has been frequently repeated in similar cases, but which has not been found to prevent a mass of matches both then and since. The truth seems to be, that the old gentleman thought the young gentleman by no means a working man, and therefore objected—believing that a small income can only be made more by unremitting industry,—and that the young gentleman adverting to the horrid and abstract fact which has been stated, and concurring, though tacitly, in the avuncular estimate of his personal predilections, did not object to being objected to. The nature of Cowper was not, indeed, passionate. He required beyond almost any man the daily society of amiable and cultivated women. It is clear that he preferred such gentle excitement to the rough and argumentative pleasures of more masculine companionship. His easy and humorous nature loved and learned from female detail. But he had no overwhelming partiality for a particular individual. One refined lady, the first moments of shyness over, was nearly as pleasing as another refined lady.

Disappointment sits easy on such a mind. No doubt, too, though perhaps unconsciously, he feared the anxious duties, perhaps even the rather contentious tenderness of matrimonial existence. At any rate, he acquiesced. Theodora never married. Love did not, however, kill her—at least, if so, it was a long time in so doing, since she survived these events more than sixty years. She never seemingly forgot the past.

But a dark cloud was at hand. If there be any truly painful fact about the world now tolerably well established by ample experience and ample records, it is that an intellectual and indolent happiness is wholly denied to the children of men. That most valuable author Lucretius, who has supplied us and others with an inexhaustible supply of metaphors on this topic, ever dwells on the life of his gods with a sad and melancholy feeling that no such life was possible on a crude and cumbersome earth. In general, the two opposing agencies are marriage and money; either of these breaks the lot of literary and refined inaction at once and for ever. The first of these, as we have seen, Cowper had escaped. His reserved and negligent reveries were still free, at least from the invasion of affection. To this invasion, indeed, there is commonly requisite the acquiescence or connivance of mortality; but all men are born, not free and equal, as the Americans maintain, but, in the old world at least, basely subjected to the yoke of coin. It is in vain that in this hemisphere we endeavour after impecuniary fancies. In bold and eager youth we go out on our travels. We visit Baalbec, and Paphos, and Tadmor, and Cythera,—ancient shrines and ancient empires, seats of eager love or gentle inspiration. We wander far and long. We have nothing to do with our fellow-men. What are we, indeed, to diggers and counters? We dream to wander for ever, but we dream in vain. A surer force than the subtlest fascination of fancy is in operation. The purse-strings tie us to our kind. Our travel-coin runs low, and we must return away from Tadmor and Baalbec back to our steady tedious industry and dull work, to '*la vieille Europe* (as Napoleon said) *qui m'ennuie*.' It is the same in thought. In vain we seclude ourselves in elegant chambers, in fascinating fancies, in refined reflections. 'By this time,' says Cowper, 'my patrimony being nearly all spent, and there being no appearance that I should ever repair the damage by a fortune of my own getting, I began to

be a little apprehensive of approaching want.' However little one is fit for it, it is necessary to attack some drudgery. The vigorous and sturdy rouse themselves to the work. They find in its regular occupation, clear decisions, and stern perplexities, a bold and rude compensation for the necessary loss or diminution of light fancies and delicate musings,—

> 'The sights which youthful poets dream,
> On summer eve by haunted stream.'

But it was not so with Cowper. A peculiar and slight nature unfitted him for so rough and harsh a resolution. The lion may eat straw like the ox, and the child put his hand on the cockatrice' den; but will even then the light antelope be equal to the heavy plough? will the gentle gazelle, even in those days, pull the slow waggon of ordinary occupation?

The outward position of Cowper was, indeed, singularly fortunate. Instead of having to meet the long labours of an open profession, or the anxious decisions of a personal business, he had the choice among several lucrative and quiet public offices, in which very ordinary abilities would suffice, and scarcely any degree of incapacity would entail dismissal, or reprimand, or degradation. It seemed at first scarcely possible that even the least strenuous of men should be found unequal to duties so little arduous or exciting. He has himself said—

> 'Lucrative offices are seldom lost
> For want of powers proportioned to the post;
> Give e'en a dunce the employment he desires,
> And he soon finds the talents it requires;
> A business with an income at its heels,
> Furnishes always oil for its own wheels.'

The place was called the Clerkship of the Journals of the House of Lords, one of the many quiet haunts which then slumbered under the imposing shade of parliamentary and aristocratic privilege. Yet it was more than he could bear.

'In the beginning,' he writes, 'a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain that, if we succeeded at last, it

would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom *a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison,* may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

'My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever: quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from anybody there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me,—a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that, had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.'

As the time of trial drew near his excitement rapidly increased. A short excursion into the country was attended

with momentary benefit; but as soon as he returned to town he became immediately unfit for occupation, and as unsettled as ever. He grew first to wish to become mad, next to believe that he should become so, and only to be afraid that the expected delirium might not come on soon enough to prevent his appearance for examination before the lords,—a fear the bare existence of which shows how slight a barrier remained between him and the insanity which he fancied that he longed for. He then began to contemplate suicide, and not unnaturally called to mind a curious circumstance:

'I well recollect, too,' he writes, 'that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me.'

And he made several attempts to execute his purpose, all which are related with curious minuteness in a 'Narrative' which he drew up after his recovery; and of which the elaborate detail shows a strange and most painful tendency to revive the slightest circumstances of delusions which it would have been most safe and most wholesome never to recall. The curiously careful style of the narration, as elegant as that of the most flowing and felicitous letter, reminds one of nothing so much as the studiously, beautiful, and compact handwriting in which Rousseau used to narrate and describe the most incoherent and indefinite of his personal delusions. On the whole, however—for a long time at least—it does not seem that the life of Cowper was in real danger. The hesitation and indeterminateness of nerve which rendered him liable to these fancies, and unequal to ordinary action, also hindered him from carrying out these terrible visitations to their rigorous and fearful consequences. At last, however, there seems to have been possible if not actual danger:

'Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends; by the help of the buckle I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

'The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, '*'Tis over!*' Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

'When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet: and, reeling and staggering, tumbled into bed again.

'By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter, but the

former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, nor at all in pain.

'Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

'I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter which lay in the middle of the room; and apprized him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were, "My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation?" I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office.'

It must have been a strange scene; for, so far as appears, the outward manners of Cowper had undergone no remarkable change. There was always a mild composure about them which would have deceived any but the most experienced observer; and it is probable that Major Cowper, his 'kinsman' and intimate friend, had very little or any previous suspicion or idea of the conflict which was raging beneath his tranquil and accomplished exterior. What a contrast is the 'broad piece of scarlet binding' and the red circle, showing plainly that I had been on the 'brink of eternity,' to the daily life of the easy gentleman 'who contributed some essays to the "St. James's Magazine," and more than one to the "St. James's Chronicle,"' living 'soft years' on a smooth superfices of existence, away from the dark realities, which are, as it were, the skeleton of our life,—which seem to haunt us like a death's head throughout the narrative that has been quoted

It was doubtless the notion of Cowper's friends, that when all idea of an examination before the Lords was removed by the abandonment of his nomination to the office in question, the excitement which that idea had called forth would very soon pass away. But that notion was an error. A far more complicated state of mind ensued. If we may advance a theory on a most difficult as well as painful topic, we would say that religion is very rarely the proximate or impulsive cause of madness. The real and ultimate cause (as we speak) is of course that unknown something which we variously call predisposition, or malady, or defect. But the critical and exciting cause seems generally to be some comparatively trivial external occasion which falls within the necessary lot and life of the person who becomes mad. The inherent excitability is usually awakened by some petty casual stimulant, which seems positively not worth a thought—certainly a terribly slight agent for the wreck and havoc which it makes. The constitution of the human mind seems to be such, that the great general questions, problems, and difficulties of our state of being do not commonly seem capable of producing that result. They appear to lie too far in the distance, to require too great a stretch of imagination, to be too apt (for the very weakness of our minds' sake perhaps) to be thrust out of view by the trivial occurrences of this desultory world,—to be too impersonal, in fact, to cause the exclusive, anxious aching occupation, which is the common prelude and occasion of insanity. Afterwards, on the other hand, when the wound is once struck, when the petty circumstance has been allowed to work its awful consequence, religion very frequently becomes the predominating topic of delusion. It would seem as if, when the mind was once set apart by the natural consequences of the disease, and secluded from the usual occupations of, and customary contact with other minds, it searched about through all the universe for causes of trouble and anguish. A certain pain probably exists; and even in insanity, man is so far a rational being that he seeks and craves at least the outside and semblance of a reason for a suffering, which is really and truly without reason. Something must be found to justify its anguish to itself. And naturally the great difficulties inherent in the very position of man in this world, and trying so deeply the faith and firmness of the wariest

and wisest minds, are ever ready to present plausible justifications for causeless depression. An anxious melancholy is not without very perplexing sophisms and very painful illustrations, with which a morbid mind can easily obtain not only a fair logical position, but even apparent argumentative victories, on many points at least, over the more hardy and vigorous part of mankind. The acuteness of madness soon perverts these, as it were, to its own wretched and terrible justification. No originality of mind is necessary for that purpose. Great and terrible systems of divinity and philosophy lie round about us, which, if true, might drive a wise man mad—which read like professed exculpations of a contemplated insanity.

'To this moment,' writes Cowper, immediately after the passage which has been quoted, 'I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind.' But now a conviction fell upon him that he was eternally lost. 'All my worldly sorrows,' he says, 'seemed as if they had never been; the terrors which succeeded them seemed so great and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself expressly excluded by one chapter; next by another.' He thought the curse of the barren fig-tree was pronounced with an especial and designed reference to him. All day long these thoughts followed him. He lived nearly alone, and his friends were either unaware of the extreme degree to which his mind was excited, or unalive to the possible alleviation with which new scenes and cheerful society might even then have been attended. He thought the people in the street stared at and despised him—that ballads were made in ridicule of him—that the voice of his conscience was externally audible. He then bethought him of a Mr. Madan, an evangelical minister, at that time held in much estimation, but who afterwards fell into disrepute by the publication of a work on marriage and its obligations (or rather its *non*-obligations), which Cowper has commented on in a controversial poem. That gentleman called on Cowper at his request, and began to explain to him the gospel.

'He spoke,' says Cowper, 'of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more on a level with the rest

of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

'Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and his righteousness, for our justification. While I heard this part of his discourse, and the scriptures on which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within me but that this was the gospel of salvation.

'Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation wrought out for me personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted He would bestow upon me. I could only reply, "I wish He would:" a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in His due time, was pleased to answer.'

It does not appear that previous to this conversation he had ever distinctly realised the tenets which were afterwards to have so much influence over him. For the moment they produced a good effect, but in a few hours their novelty was over—the dark hour returned, and he awoke from slumber with a 'stronger alienation from God than ever.' The remarkable tenacity with which the mind in moments of excitement appropriates and retains very abstract tenets that bear even in slight degree on the topic of its excitement, is as remarkable as the facility and accuracy with which it apprehends them in the midst of so great a tumult. Many changes and many years rolled over Cowper—years of black and dark depression, years of tranquil society, of genial labour, of literary fame, but never in the lightest or darkest hour was he wholly unconscious of the abstract creed of Martin Madan. At the time, indeed, the body had its rights, and maintained them.

'While I traversed the apartment, expecting very moment that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me, my conscience scaring me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight, a strange and horrible darkness fell upon

me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thought and expressions became more wild and incoherent; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement.'

It is idle to follow details further. The deep waters had passed over him, and it was long before the face of his mind was dry or green again.

He was placed in a lunatic asylum, where he continued many months, and which he left apparently cured. After some changes of no moment, but which by his own account evinced many traces of dangerous excitement, he took up his abode at Huntingdon, with the family of Unwin; and it is remarkable how soon the taste for easy and simple, yet not wholly unintellectual society, which had formerly characterised him, revived again. The delineation cannot be given in any terms but his own:—

'We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns,

or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life, above all, for a heart to like it.'

Mr. Unwin, the husband of Mrs. Unwin, was suddenly killed soon after, and Cowper removed with Mrs. Unwin to Olney where a new epoch of his life begins.

The curate of Olney at this time was John Newton, a man of great energy of mind, and well known in his generation not only for several vigorous works, but still more for a very remarkable life. He had been captain of a Liverpool slave ship—an occupation in which he had quite energy enough to have succeeded, but had left it from serious motives, and become one of the strongest and most active of the Low Church clergymen of that day. He was in truth one of those men who seem intended to make excellence disagreeable. He was a converting engine. The whole of his own enormous vigour of body—the whole steady intensity of a pushing, impelling, compelling, unoriginal mind—all the mental or corporeal exertion he could exact from the weak or elicit from the strong, were devoted to one sole purpose—the effectual impact of the Calvinistic tenets on the parishioners of Olney. Nor do we wish to hint or suggest that his exertions were futile or useless. There is no denying that there is a certain stiff, tough, agricultural, clayish English nature on which the aggressive divine produces a visible and good effect. The hardest and heaviest hammering seems required to stir and warm that close and coarse matter. To impress any sense of the supernatural on so secular a substance is a great good, though that sense be expressed in false or perplexing or irritating theories. It is unpleasant, no doubt, to hear the hammering; the bystanders are in an evil case; you might as well live near an iron ship yard. Still the blows do not hurt the iron. Something of the sort is necessary to beat the coarse ore into a shining and useful shape. But the case is different when the hundred-handed divine desires to

hit others. The very system which, on account of its hard blows, is adapted to the tough and ungentle, is by that very reason unfit for the tremulous and tender. The nature of many men and many women is such that it will not bear the daily and incessant repetition of some certain and indisputable truths. The universe has of course its dark aspect. Many tremendous facts and difficulties can be found which often haunt the timid and sometimes incapacitate the feeble. To be continually insisting on these, and these only, will simply render both more and more unfit for the duties to which they were born. And if this is the case with certain fact, and clear truth, how much more with uncertain error and mystic exaggeration! Mr. Newton was alive to this consequence of his system: 'I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life women lead here, &c. &c., I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them, I believe, *truly gracious people*.' He perhaps found his peculiar views more generally appreciated among this class of young ladies than among more healthy and rational people, and clearly did not wholly condemn the delivering them even at this cost from the tyranny of the 'carnal reason.'

No more dangerous adviser, if this world had been searched over, could have been found for Cowper. What the latter required was prompt encouragement to cheerful occupation, quiet amusement, gentle and unexhausting society. Mr. Newton thought otherwise. His favourite motto was *Perimus in licitis*. All that easy and simple round of daily pleasures and genial employments which are the sources of instinctive happiness to the happiest natures, and most effectually cheer and vary the common life of common men, were studiously watched and scrutinized with the energy of a Puritan and the watchfulness of an inquisitor. Mr. Newton had all the tastes and habits which go to form what in the Catholic system is called a spiritual director. Of late years it is well known that the institution, or rather practice of confession, has expanded and developed into a greater and more potent and more imperious organisation. You are expected by the priests of the Roman Church not only to confess to them what you have done, but to take their advice as to what you shall do. The future is under their direction just as the past was beneath their scrutiny. This

was exactly the view which Mr. Newton took of his relation to Cowper. A natural aptitude for dictation—a steady, strong, compelling decision,—great self-command, and a sharp perception of all impressible points in the characters of others,—make the task of guiding 'weaker brethren' a natural and pleasant pursuit. To suppose a shrinking, a wounded, and tremulous mind like that of Cowper's would rise against such bold dogmatism, such hard volition, such animal nerve, is to fancy that the beaten slave will dare the lash which his very eyes instinctively fear and shun. Mr. Newton's great idea was that Cowper ought to be of some use. There was a great deal of excellent hammering hammered in the parish, and it was sinful that a man with nothing to do should sit tranquil. Several persons in the street had done what they ought not; football was not unknown; cards were played; flirtation was not conducted 'improvingly.' It was clearly Cowper's duty to put a stop to such things. Accordingly he made him a parochial implement; he set him to visit painful cases, to attend at prayer meetings, to compose melancholy hymns, even to conduct or share in conducting public services himself. It never seems to have occurred to him that so fragile a mind would be unequal to the burden—that a bruised reed does often break; or rather if it did occur to him, he regarded it as a subterranean suggestion, and expected a supernatural interference to counteract the events at which it hinted. Yet there are certain rules and principles in this world which seem earthly, but which the most excellent may not on that account venture to disregard. The consequence of placing Cowper in exciting situations was a return of his excitement. It is painful to observe, that though the attack resembled in all its main features his former one, it was several months before Mr. Newton could be brought to allow any proper physical remedies to be applied, and then it was too late. We need not again recount details. Many months of dark despondency were to be passed before he returned to a simple and rational mind.

The truth is, that independently of the personal activity and dauntless energy which made Mr. Newton so little likely to sympathize with such a mind as Cowper's, the former lay under a still more dangerous disqualification for Cowper's predominant adviser, viz., an erroneous view of his case. His opinion exactly coincided with that which Cowper first heard from Mr. Madan

during his first illness in London. This view is in substance that the depression which Cowper originally suffered from was exactly what almost all mankind, if they had been rightly aware of their true condition, would have suffered also. They were 'children of wrath,' just as he was; and the only difference between them was, that he appreciated his state and they did not,—showing in fact that Cowper was not, as common persons imagined, on the extreme verge of insanity, but, on the contrary, a particularly rational and right-seeing man. So far, as Cowper says, with one of the painful smiles which make his 'Narrative' so melancholy, 'my condition was less desperate.' That is, his counsellors had persuaded him that his malady was rational, and his sufferings befitting his true position,—no difficult task, for they had the poignancy of pain and the pertinacity of madness on their side: the efficacy of their arguments was less when they endeavoured to make known the sources of consolation. We have seen the immediate effect of the first exposition of the evangelical theory of faith. When applied to the case of the morbidly-despairing sinner, that theory has one argumentative imperfection which the logical sharpness of madness will soon discover and point out. The simple reply is, 'I do not feel the faith which you describe. I wish I could feel it, but it is no use trying to conceal the fact, I am conscious of nothing like it.' And this was substantially Cowper's reply on his first interview with Mr. Madan. It was a simple denial of a fact solely accessible to his personal consciousness; and, as such, unanswerable. And in this intellectual position (if such it can be called) his mind long rested. At the commencement of his residence at Olney, however, there was a decided change. Whether it were that he mistook the glow of physical recovery for the peace of spiritual renovation, or that some subtler and deeper agency were, as was supposed, at work, the outward sign is certain; and there is no question but that during the first months of his residence at Olney and his daily intercourse with Mr. Newton, he did feel, or supposed himself to feel, the faith which he was instructed to deem so desirable, and he easily lent himself with natural pleasure to the diffusion of it among those around him. But this theory in question requires a metaphysical postulate, which to many minds is simply impossible. A prolonged meditation on unseen realities is sufficiently difficult, and seems scarcely the occupation for

which common human nature was intended; but more than this is alleged to be essential. The meditation must be successful in exciting certain feelings of a kind peculiarly delicate, subtle, and (so to speak) unstable. The wind bloweth where it listeth; but it is scarcely more partial, more quick, more unaccountable, than the glow of an emotion excited by a supernatural and unseen object. This depends on the vigour of imagination which has to conceive that object—on the vivacity of feeling which has to be quickened by it—on the physical energy which has to maintain and support it. The very watchfulness, the scrupulous anxiety to find and retain it, are exactly the most unfavourable to it. In a delicate disposition like that of Cowper, such feelings revolt from the inquisition of others, and shrink from the stare of the mind itself. But this is not the worst. The mind of Cowper was, so to speak, naturally terrestrial. If a man wishes for a nice appreciation of the details of time and sense, let him consult Cowper's miscellaneous letters. Each simple event of every day—each petty object of external observation or inward suggestion, is there chronicled with a fine and female fondness, a wise and happy faculty, let us say, of deriving a gentle happiness from the tranquil and passing hour. The fortunes of the hares—Bess who died young, and Tiney who lived to be nine years old—the miller who engaged their affections at once, his powdered coat having charms that were irresistible—the knitting-needles of Mrs. Unwin—the qualities of his friend Hill who managed his money transactions—

> 'An honest man, close buttoned to the chin,
> Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within'—

live in his pages, and were the natural, insensible, unbiassed occupants of his fancy. It is easy for a firm and hard mind to despise the minutiæ of life, and to pore and brood over an abstract proposition. It may be possible for the highest, the strongest, the most arduous imagination to live aloof from common things—alone with the unseen world, as some lived their whole lives in memory with a world which has passed away. But it seems hardly possible that an imagination such as Cowper's, which was rather a detective fancy, perceiving the charm and essence of things which are seen, than an eager, actuating, conceptive power embodying, enlivening, empowering those which are not seen, should leave its own home—

the *domus et tellus*—the sweet fields and rare orchards which it loved,—and go out alone apart from all flesh into the trackless and fearful and unknown Infinite. Of course, his timid mind shrank from it at once, and returned to its own fireside. After a little, the idea that he had a true faith faded away. Mr. Newton, with misdirected zeal, sought to revive it by inciting him to devotional composition; but the only result was the volume of 'Olney Hymns'—a very painful record, of which the burden is

> 'My former hopes are fled,
> My terror now begins;
> I feel, alas! that I am dead
> In trespasses and sins.
>
> 'Ah, whither shall I fly?
> I hear the thunder roar;
> The law proclaims destruction nigh,
> And vengeance at the door.'

'The Preacher' himself did not conceive such a store of melancholy forebodings.

The truth is, that there are two remarkable species of minds on which the doctrine of Calvinism is a deadly and fatal poison. One is the natural, vigorous, bold, defiant, hero-like character, abounding in generosity, in valour, in vigour, and abounding also in self-will, and pride, and scorn. This is the temperament which supplies the world with ardent hopes and keen fancies, with springing energies, and bold plans, and noble exploits; but yet, under another aspect and in other times, is equally prompt in desperate deeds, awful machinations, deep and daring crimes. It one day is ready by its innate heroism to deliver the world from any tyranny; the next it 'hungers to become a tyrant' in its turn. Yet the words of the poet are ever true and are ever good, as a defence against the cold narrators who mingle its misdeeds and exploits, and profess to believe that each is a set off and compensation for the other.

> 'Still he retained,
> 'Mid much abasement, what he had received
> From Nature, an intense and glowing mind.'

It is idle to tell such a mind that by an arbitrary irrespec-

tive election it is chosen to happiness or doomed to perdition. The evil and the good in it equally revolt at such terms. It thinks, 'Well, if the universe be a tyranny, if one man is doomed to misery for no fault, and the next is chosen to pleasure for no merit—if the favouritism of time be copied into eternity—if the highest heaven be indeed like the meanest earth,—then, as the heathen say, it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it, better to be the victims of the eternal despotism than its ministers, better to curse in hell than serve in heaven.' And the whole burning soul breaks away into what is well called Satanism—into wildness, and bitterness, and contempt.

Cowper had as little in common with this proud Titanic, aspiring genius as any man has or can have, but his mind was equally injured by the same system. On a timid, lounging, gentle, acquiescent mind, the effect is precisely the contrary—singularly contrasted but equally calamitous. 'I am doomed, you tell me, already. One way or other the matter is already settled. It can be no better, and it is as bad as it can be. Let me alone; do not trouble me at least these few years. Let me at least sit sadly and bewail myself. Action is useless. I will brood upon my melancholy and be at rest;' the soul sinks into 'passionless calm and silence unreproved,' flinging away 'the passionate tumult of a clinging hope,' which is the allotted boon and happiness of mortality. It was, as we believe, straight towards this terrible state that Mr. Newton directed Cowper. He kept him occupied with subjects which were too great for him; he kept him away from his natural life; he presented to him views and opinions but too well justifying his deep and dark insanity; he convinced him that he ought to experience emotions which were foreign to his nature; he had nothing to add by way of comfort when told that those emotions did not and could not exist. Cowper seems to have felt this. His second illness commenced with a strong dislike to his spiritual adviser, and it may be doubted if there ever was again the same cordiality between them. Mr. Newton, too, as was natural, was vexed at Cowper's calamity. His reputation in the 'religious world' was deeply pledged to conducting this most 'interesting case' to a favorable termination. A failure was not to be contemplated, and yet it was obviously coming and coming. It was to no purpose that Cowper acquired fame and

secular glory in the literary world. This was rather adding gall to bitterness. The unbelievers in evangelical religion would be able to point to one at least, and that the best known among its proselytes, to whom it had not brought peace—whom it had rather confirmed in wretchedness. His literary fame, too, took Cowper away into a larger circle, out of the rigid decrees and narrow ordinances of his father-confessor, and of course the latter remonstrated. Altogether there was not a cessation, but a decline and diminution of intercourse. But better, as Lord Brougham used to say in divorce cases, had they never met or never parted. If a man is to have a father-confessor, let him at least choose a sensible one. The dominion of Mr. Newton had been exercised, not indeed, with mildness, or wisdom, or discrimination, but, nevertheless, with strong judgment and coarse acumen—with a bad choice of ends, but at least a vigorous selection of means. Afterwards it was otherwise. In the village of Olney there was a schoolmaster, whose name often occurs in Cowper's letters,—a foolish, vain, worthy sort of man: what the people of the west call a 'scholard,' that is, a man of more knowledge and less sense than those about him. He sometimes came to Cowper to beg old clothes, sometimes to instruct him with literary criticisms, and is known in the 'Correspondence' as 'Mr. Teedon, who reads the Monthly Review,' 'Mr. Teedon whose smile is fame.' Yet to this man, whose harmless follies his humour had played with a thousand times, Cowper, in his later years, and when the dominion of Mr. Newton had so far ceased as to leave him, after many years, the use of his own judgment, resorted for counsel and guidance. And the man had visions, and dreams, and revelations!! But enough of such matters.

The peculiarity of Cowper's life is its division into marked periods. From his birth to his first illness he may be said to have lived in one world, and for some twenty years afterwards, from his thirty-second to about his fiftieth year, in a wholly distinct one, and much of that time was spent in hopeless despondency. His principal companions during that time were Mr. Newton, about whom we have been writing, and Mrs. Unwin, who may be said to have broken the charmed circle of seclusion in which they lived by inciting Cowper to continuous literary composition. Of Mrs. Unwin herself ample memorials remain. She was, in truth, a most excellent

person—in truth and years much older than the poet—as it were by profession elderly, able in every species of preserve, profound in salts, and pans, and jellies; culinary by taste; by tact and instinct motherly and housewifish. She was not, however, without some less larderiferous qualities. Lady Hesketh and Lady Austen, neither of them very favourably-prejudiced critics, decided so. The former has written, 'She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety.... I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way.' This she showed by persuading Cowper to the composition of his first volume.

As a poet, Cowper belongs, though with some differences, to the school of Pope. Great question, as is well known, has been raised whether that very accomplished writer was a poet at all; and a secondary and equally debated question runs side by side, whether, if a poet, he were a great one. With the peculiar genius and personal rank of Pope we have in this article nothing to do. But this much may be safely said, that according to the definition which has been ventured of the poetical art, by the greatest and most accomplished of the other school, his works are delicately-finished specimens of artistic excellence in one branch of it. 'Poetry,' says Shelley, who was surely a good judge, 'is the expression of the imagination,' by which he meant of course not only the expression of the interior sensations accompanying the faculty's employment, but likewise, and more emphatically, the exercise of it in the delineation of objects which attract it. Now society, viewed as a whole, is clearly one of those objects. There is a vast assemblage of human beings, of all nations, tongues, and languages, each with ideas and a personality and a cleaving mark of its own, yet each having somewhat that resembles something of all, much that resembles a part of many—a motley regiment, of various forms, of a million impulses, passions, thoughts, fancies, motives, actions; a 'many-headed monstered thing;'

a Bashi Bazouk array; a clown to be laughed at; a hydra to be spoken evil of; yet, in fine, our all—the very people of the whole earth. There is nothing in nature more attractive to the fancy than this great spectacle and congregation. Since Herodotus went to and fro to the best of his ability over all the earth, the spectacle of civilisation has ever drawn to itself the quick eyes and quick tongues of seeing and roving men. Not only, says Goethe, is man ever interesting to man, but 'properly there is nothing else interesting.' There is a distinct subject for poetry—at least according to Shelley's definition—in selecting and working out, in idealising, in combining, in purifying, in intensifying the great features and peculiarities which make society, as a whole, interesting, remarkable, fancy-taking. No doubt it is not the object of poetry to versify the works of the eminent narrators, 'to prose,' according to a disrespectful description, 'o'er books of travelled seamen,' to chill you with didactic icebergs, to heat you with torrid sonnets. The difficulty of reading such local narratives is now great—so great that a gentleman in the reviewing department once wished 'one man would go everywhere and say everything,' in order that the limit of his labour at least might be settled and defined. And it would certainly be much worse if palm trees were of course to be in rhyme, and the dinner of the migrator only recountable in blank verse. We do not wish this. We only maintain that there are certain principles, causes, passions, affections, acting on and influencing communities at large, permeating their life, ruling their principles, directing their history, working as a subtle and wandering principle over all their existence. These have a somewhat abstract character, as compared with the soft ideals and passionate incarnations of purely individual character, and seem dull beside the stirring lays of eventful times, in which the earlier and bolder poets delight. The tendency of civilisation is to pare away the oddness and licence of personal character, and to leave a monotonous agreeableness as the sole trait and comfort of mankind. And this very effect obviously tends to increase the efficacy of general principles, to bring to view the daily efficacy of constant causes, to suggest the hidden agency of subtle abstractions. Accordingly as civilization augments and philosophy grows, we commonly find a school

of 'common-sense poets,' as they may be called, arise and develop, who proceed to describe what they see around them, to describe its *natura naturans*, to delineate its *natura naturata*, to evolve its productive agencies, to pursue their subtle ramifications. Complete, as the most characteristic specimen of this class of poets, stands Pope. He was the sort of person we cannot even conceive existing in a barbarous age. His subject was not life at large, but fashionable life. He described the society in which he was thrown—the people among whom he lived. His mind was a hoard of small maxims, a quintessence of petty observations. When he described character, he described it not dramatically, nor as it is in itself; but observantly and from without, calling up in the mind not so much a vivid conception of the man, of the real, corporal, outward substantial being, as an idea of the idea which a metaphysical bystander in an elaborate moment might refine and excruciate concerning him. Society in Pope is scarcely a society of people, but of pretty little atoms, coloured and painted with hoops or in coats—a miniature of metaphysics, a puppet-show of sylphs. Yet exactly on this account it the more elucidates the doctrine, that the tendency of civilised poetry is towards an analytic sketch of the existing civilisation. Nor is the effect diminished by the pervading character of keen judgment and minute intrusive sagacity; for no great painter of English life can be without a rough sizing of strong sense; or he would fail from want of sympathy with his subject. In short, Pope does but the more represent the class and type of 'common-sense' poets who substitute an animated '*catalogue raisonné*' of working thoughts and operative principles—a sketch of the then present society, as a whole and as an object, for the κλέα ανδρῶν, the tale of which is one subject of early verse and the stage effect of living, loving, passionate, impetuous men and women, which are special topics of another.

What Pope is to our fashionable and town life, Cowper is to our domestic and rural life. This is perhaps the reason why he is so national. It has been said no foreigner can live in the country. We doubt whether any people, who felt their whole heart, and entire exclusive breath of their existence to be concentrated in a great capital, could or would appreciate such intensely provincial pictures as are the entire scope of

Cowper's delineation. A good many imaginative persons are really plagued with him. Everything is so comfortable; the tea-urn hisses so plainly, the toast is so warm, the breakfast so neat, the food so edible, that one turns away, in excitable moments, a little angrily from anything so quiet, tame, and sober. Have we not always hated this life? What can be worse than regular meals, clock-moving servants, a time for everything, and everything then done, a place for everything without the Irish alleviation, 'Sure, and I'm rejiced to say, that's jist and exactly where it isn't,' a common gardener, a slow parson, a heavy assortment of near relations, a placid house flowing with milk and sugar—all that the fates can stuff together of substantial comfort, and fed and fatted monotony? Aspiring and excitable youth stoutly maintains it can endure anything much better than the 'gross fog Bœotian'—the torpid, in-door, tea-tabular felicity. Still a great deal of tea is really consumed in the English nation. A settled and practical people are distinctly in favour of heavy relaxations, placid prolixities, slow comforts. A state between the mind and the body, something intermediate, half-way from the newspaper to a nap—this is what we may call the middle-life theory of the influential English gentleman—the true aspiration of the ruler of the world.

> 'Tis then the understanding takes repose
> In indolent vacuity of thought,
> And sleeps and is refreshed. Meanwhile the face
> Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
> Of deep deliberation.'

It is these in-door scenes, this common world, this gentle round of 'calm delights,' the trivial course of slowly-moving pleasures, the petty detail of quiet relaxation, that Cowper excels in. The post-boy, the winter's evening, the newspaper, the knitting needles, the stockings, the waggon—these are his subjects. His sure popularity arises from his having held up to the English people exact delineations of what they really prefer. Perhaps one person in four hundred understands Wordsworth, about one in eight thousand may appreciate Shelley, but there is no expressing the small fraction who do not love dulness, who do not enter into

> 'Homeborn happiness,
> Fireside enjoyments, intimate delights,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.'

His objection to the more exciting and fashionable pleasures was perhaps, in an extreme analysis, that they put him out. They were too great a task for his energies—asked too much for his spirits. His comments on them rather remind us of Mr. Rushworth—Miss Austen's heavy hero's remark on the theatre, 'I think we went on much better by ourselves before this was thought of, doing, doing, doing *nothing*.'

The subject of these pictures, in point of interest, may be what we choose to think it, but there is no denying great merit to the execution. The sketches have the highest merit —suitableness of style. It would be absurd to describe a post-boy as sonneteers their mistress—to cover his plain face with fine similes—to put forward the 'brow of Egypt'—to stick metaphors upon him, as the Americans upon General Washington. The only merit such topics have room for is an easy and dextrous plainness—a sober suit of well-fitting expressions—a free, working, flowing, picturesque garb of words adapted to the solid conduct of a sound and serious world, and this merit Cowper's style has. On the other hand, it entirely wants the higher and rarer excellences of poetical expression. There is none of the choice art which has studiously selected the words of one class of great poets, or the rare, untaught, unteachable felicity which has vivified those of others. No one, in reading Cowper, stops as if to draw his breath more deeply over expressions which do not so much express or clothe poetical expressions, as seem to intertwine, coalesce, and be blended with the very essence of poetry itself.

Of course a poet could not deal in any measure with such subjects as Cowper dealt with, and not become inevitably, to a certain extent, satirical. The ludicrous is in some sort the imagination of common life. The 'dreary intercourse' of which Wordsworth makes mention, would be dreary, unless some people possessed more than he did the faculty of making fun. A universe in which Dignity No. I. conversed decorously with Dignity No. II. on topics befitting their state, would be

perhaps a levee of great intellects and a tea-table of enormous thoughts; but it would want the best charm of this earth—the medley of great things and little, of things mundane and things celestial, things low and things awful, of things eternal and things of half a minute. It is in this contrast that humour and satire have their place—pointing out the intense unspeakable incongruity of the groups and juxtapositions of our world. To all of these which fell under his own eye, Cowper was alive. A gentle sense of propriety and consistency in daily things was evidently characteristic of him; and if he fail of the highest success in this species of art, it is not from an imperfect treatment of the scenes and conceptions which he touched, but from the fact that the follies with which he deals are not the greatest follies—that there are deeper absurdities in human life than John Gilpin touches upon—that the superficial occurrences of ludicrous life do not exhaust or even deeply test the mirthful resources of our minds and fortunes.

As a scold, we think Cowper failed. He had a great idea of the use of railing, and there are many pages of laudable invective against various vices which we feel no call whatever to defend. But a great vituperator had need to be a great hater; and of any real rage, any such gall and bitterness as great and irritable satirists have in other ages let loose upon men, of any thorough, brooding, burning, abiding, detestation, he was as incapable as a tame hare. His vituperation reads like the mild man's whose wife ate up his dinner, 'Really, Sir, I feel quite *angry!*' Nor has his language any of the sharp intrusive acumen which divides in sunder both soul and spirit, that is necessary for fierce and unforgettable reviling.

Some people may be surprised, notwithstanding our lengthy explanation, at hearing Cowper treated as of the school of Pope. It has been customary, at least with some critics, to speak of him as one of those who recoiled from the artificiality of that great writer, and at least commenced a return to a simple delineation of outward nature. And of course there is considerable truth in this idea. The poetry (if such it is) of Pope would be just as true if all the trees were yellow and all the grass flesh-colour. He did not care for 'snowy scalps,' or 'rolling streams,' or 'icy halls,' or 'precipice's gloom.' Nor for that matter did Cowper either. He, as Hazlitt most justly

said, was as much afraid of a shower of rain as any man that ever lived. At the same time, the fashionable life described by Pope has no reference whatever to the beauties of the material universe, never regards them, could go on just as well in the soft, sloppy, gelatinous existence which Dr. Whewell (who knows) says is alone possible in Jupiter and Saturn. Indeed, a good deal of Pope would perhaps suit a warm and refined polyp. But the rural life of Cowper's poetry has a constant and necessary reference to the country, is identified with its features, cannot be separated from it even in fancy. Green fields and a slow river seem all the material of beauty Cowper had given him. But what is more to the purpose, his attention was well concentrated upon them. As he himself said, he did not go more than thirteen miles from home for twenty years, and very seldom as far. He was, therefore, well able to find out all that was charming in Olney and its neighbourhood, and as it presented nothing which is not to be found in any of the fresh country parts of England, what he has left us is really a delicate description and appreciative delineation of the simple essential English country.

However, it is to be remarked that the description of nature in Cowper differs altogether from the peculiar delineation of the same subject, which has been so influential in more recent times, and which bears, after its greatest master, the name Wordsworthian. To Cowper nature is simply a background, a beautiful background no doubt, but still essentially a *locus in quo*—a space in which the work and mirth of life pass and are performed. A more professed delineation does not occur than the following :—

> 'Oh Winter! ruler of the inverted year,
> Thy scattered hair with sleet-like ashes filled,
> Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
> Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
> Than those of age, thy forehead wrapped in clouds,
> A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
> A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
> But urged by storms along its slippery way;
> I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
> And dreaded as thou art. Thou holdest the sun
> A prisoner in the yet undawning east,

Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering, at short notice, in one group
The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee King of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know.
No rattling wheels stop short before these gates.'

After a very few lines he returns within doors to the occupation of man and woman—to human tasks and human pastimes. To Wordsworth, on the contrary, nature is a religion. So far from being unwilling to treat her as a special object of study, he hardly thought any other equal or comparable. He was so far from holding the doctrine that the earth was made for men to live in, that it would rather seem as if he thought men were created to see the earth. The whole aspect of nature was to him a special revelation of an immanent and abiding power—a breath of the pervading art—a smile of the Eternal Mind—according to the lines which every one knows,—

'A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused;
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.'

Of this haunting, supernatural, mystical view of nature Cowper never heard. Like the strong old lady who said, '*She* was born before nerves were invented,' he may be said to have lived before the awakening of the detective sensibility which reveals this deep and obscure doctrine.

In another point of view, also, Cowper is curiously contrasted with Wordsworth, as a delineator of nature. The delineation of Cowper is a simple delineation. He makes a sketch of the object before him, and there he leaves it. Wordsworth, on the contrary, is not satisfied unless he describe not only the bare inanimate outward object which others see, but likewise the reflected high-wrought feelings which that object excites in a brooding self-conscious mind. His subject was not so much nature, as nature reflected by Wordsworth. Years of deep musing and long introspection had made him familiar with every shade and shadow in the many-coloured impression which the universe makes on meditative genius and observant sensibility. Now these feelings Cowper did not describe, because, to all appearance, he did not perceive them. He had a great pleasure in watching the common changes and common aspects of outward things, but he was not invincibly prone to brood and pore over their reflex effects upon his own mind.

> 'A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.'

According to the account which Cowper at first gave of his literary occupations, his entire design was to communicate the religious views to which he was then a convert. He fancied that the vehicle of verse might bring many to listen to truths which they would be disinclined to have stated to them in simple prose. And however tedious the recurrence of these theological tenets may be to the common reader, it is certain that a considerable portion of Cowper's peculiar popularity may be traced to their expression. He is the one poet of a class which have no poets. In that once large and still considerable portion of the English world, which regards the exercise of the fancy and the imagination as dangerous—snares, as they speak—distracting the soul from an intense consideration of abstract doctrine, Cowper's strenuous inculcation of those doctrines has obtained for him a certain toleration. Of course all verse is perilous. The use of single words is harmless, but the employment of two, in such a manner as to form a rhyme—the regularities of interval and studied recurrence of the same sound, evince an attention to time, and a partiality to things of

sense. Most poets must be prohibited; the exercise of the fancy requires watching. But Cowper is a ticket-of-leave man. He has the chaplain's certificate. He has expressed himself 'with the utmost propriety.' The other imaginative criminals must be left to the fates, but he may be admitted to the sacred drawing-room, though with constant care and scrupulous *surveillance*. Perhaps, however, taken in connection with his diseased and peculiar melancholy, these tenets really add to the artistic effect of Cowper's writings. The free discussion of daily matters, the delicate delineation of domestic detail, the passing narrative of fugitive occurrences, would seem light and transitory, if it were not broken by the interruption of a terrible earnestness, and relieved by the dark background of deep and foreboding sadness. It is scarcely artistic to describe 'the painted veil which those who live call life,' and leave wholly out of view and undescribed 'the chasm sightless and drear,' which lies always beneath and around it.

It is of the 'Task' more than of Cowper's earlier volume of poems that a critic of his poetry must more peculiarly be understood to speak. All the best qualities of his genius are there concentrated, and the alloy is less than elsewhere. He was fond of citing the saying of Dryden, that the rhyme had often helped him to a thought—a great but very perilous truth. The difficulty is, that the rhyme so frequently helps to the wrong thought—that the stress of the mind is recalled from the main thread of the poem, from the narrative, or sentiment, or delineation, to some wayside remark or fancy, which the casual resemblances of final sound suggest. This is fatal, unless either a poet's imagination be so hot and determined as to bear down upon its objects, and to be unwilling to hear the voice of any charmer who might distract it, or, else, the nature of the poem itself should be of so desultory a character that it does not much matter about the sequence of the thought—at least within great and ample limits, as in some of Swift's casual rhymes, where the sound itself does seem really and truly the connecting link of unity. Now Cowper is not often in either of these positions; he always has a thread of argument on which he is hanging his illustrations, and yet he has not the exclusive interest or the undeviating energetic downrightness of mind which would ensure his going through it without idling or turning aside; consequently the thoughts

which the rhyme suggests are constantly breaking in upon the main matter, destroying the emphatic unity which is essential to rhythmical delineation. His blank verse of course is exempt from this defect, and there is moreover something in the nature of the metre which fits it for the expression of studious and quiet reflection. The 'Task' was, in fact, composed at the healthiest period of Cowper's later life, in the full vigour of his faculties, and the additional spur that he was well aware the semi-recognition of his first volume had made it a common subject of literary discussion, whether he was a poet or not. Many men could endure—as indeed all but about ten do actually in every generation endure—to be without this distinction, but few could have an idea that it was a frequent point of argument whether they were duly entitled or not, without at least a strong desire to settle the question by some work of decisive excellence. This the 'Task' achieved for Cowper. Since its publication his name has been a household word—a particularly household word in English literature. The story of its composition is connected with one of the most curious incidents in Cowper's later life, and has given occasion to a good deal of writing.

In the summer of 1781, it happened that two ladies called at a shop exactly opposite the house at Olney where Cowper and Mrs. Unwin resided. One of these was a familiar and perhaps tame object,—a Mrs. Jones,—the wife of a neighbouring parson; the other, however, was so striking, that Cowper, one of the shyest and least demonstrative of men, immediately asked Mrs. Unwin to invite her to tea. This was a great event, as it would appear that few or no social interruptions, casual or contemplated, then varied what Cowper called the 'duality of his existence.' This favoured individual was Lady Austen, a person of what Mr. Haley terms 'colloquial talents;' in truth an energetic, vivacious, amusing, and rather handsome lady of the world. She had been much in France, and is said to have caught the facility of manner and love of easy society, which is the unchanging characteristic of that land of change. She was a fascinating person in the great world, and it is not difficult to imagine she must have been an excitement indeed at Olney. She was, however, most gracious; fell in love, as Cowper says, not only

with him but with Mrs. Unwin ; was called 'Sister Ann,' laughed and made laugh, was altogether so great an acquisition that his seeing her seemed in his view to show 'strong marks of providential interposition.' He thought her superior to the curate's wife, who was a 'valuable person,' but had a family, &c. &c. The new acquaintance had much to contribute to the Olney conversation. She had seen much of the world, and probably seen it well, and had at least a good deal to narrate concerning it. Among other interesting matters she one day recounted to Cowper the story of John Gilpin, as one which she had heard in childhood, and in a short time the poet sent her the ballad, which every one has liked ever since. It was written, he says, no doubt truly, in order to relieve a fit of terrible and uncommon despondency; but altogether, for a few months after the introduction of this new companion, he was more happy and animated than at any other time after his first illness. Clouds, however, began to show themselves soon. The circumstances are of the minute and female kind, which it would require a good deal of writing to describe, even if we knew them perfectly. The original cause of misconstruction was a rather romantic letter of Lady Austen, drawing a sublime picture of what she expected from Cowper's friendship. Mr. Scott, the clergyman at Olney, who had taken the place of Mr. Newton, and who is described as a dry and sensible man, gave a short account of what he thought was the real embroilment. 'Who,' said he, 'can be surprised that two women should be daily in the society of one man and then quarrel with *one another*?'

'From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement,' he says to Mr. Unwin, 'we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of

that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused.'

Things were in this state when she suggested to him the composition of a new poem of some length in blank verse, and on being asked to suggest a subject, said, Well, write upon that 'sofa,' whence is the title of the first book of the 'Task.' According to Cowper's own account, it was this poem which was the cause of the ensuing dissension.

On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began the "Task;" for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing; and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the "Task," to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol.'

And it is possible that this is the true account of the matter. Yet we fancy there is a kind of awkwardness and constraint in the manner in which it is spoken of. Of course, the plain and literal portion of mankind have set it down at once that Cowper was in love with Lady Austen, just as they married him over and over again to Mrs. Unwin. But of a strong passionate love, as we have before explained, we do not think Cowper capable, and there are certainly no signs of it in this case. There is, however, one odd circumstance. Years after, when no longer capable of original composition, he was fond of hearing all his poems read to him except 'John Gilpin.' There were recollections, he said, connected with those verses which were too painful. Did he mean,

the worm that dieth not—the reminiscence of the animated narratress of that not intrinsically melancholy legend?

The literary success of Cowper opened to him a far larger circle of acquaintance, and connected him in close bonds with many of his relations, who had looked with an unfavourable eye at the peculiar tenets which he had adopted, and the peculiar and recluse life which he had been advised to lead. It is to these friends and acquaintance that we owe that copious correspondence on which so much of Cowper's fame at present rests. The complete letter-writer is now an unknown animal. In the last century, when communications were difficult and epistles rare, there were a great many valuable people who devoted a good deal of time to writing elaborate letters. You wrote letters to a man whom you knew nineteen years and a half ago, and told him what you had for dinner, and what your second cousin said, and how the crops got on. Every detail of life was described, and dwelt on, and improved. The art of writing, at least of writing easily, was comparatively rare, which kept the number of such compositions within narrow limits. Sir Walter Scott says he knew a man who remembered that the London post-bag once came to Edinburgh with only one letter in it. One can fancy the solemn conscientious elaborateness with which a person would write, with the notion that his letter would have a whole coach and a whole bag to itself, and travel two hundred miles alone, the exclusive object of a red guard's care. The only thing like it now—the deferential minuteness with which one public office writes to another, conscious that the letter will travel on her Majesty's service three doors down the passage—sinks by comparison into cursory brevity. No administrative reform will be able to bring even the official mind of these days into the grave inch-an-hour conscientiousness with which a confidential correspondent of a century ago related the growth of apples, the manufacture of jams, the appearance of flirtations, and other such like things. All the ordinary incidents of an easy life were made the most of; a party was epistolary capital, a race a mine of wealth. So deeply sentimental was this intercourse, that it was much argued whether the affections were created for the sake of the ink, or ink for the sake of the affections. Thus it continued for many years, and the fruits thereof are written in

the volumes of family papers which daily appear, are praised as materials for an historian at present in a crib, and consigned, as the case may be, to posterity or oblivion. All this has now passed away. Sir Rowland Hill is entitled to the credit, not only of introducing stamps, but also of destroying letters. The amount of annotations which will be required to make the notes of this day intelligible to posterity is a wonderful idea, and no quantity of comment will make them readable. You might as well publish a collection of telegraphs. The careful detail, the studious minuteness, the circumstantial statement of a former time, is exchanged for a curt brevity or only half-intelligible narration. In old times, letters were written for people who knew nothing and required to be told everything. Now they are written for people who know everything except the one thing which the letter is designed to explain to them. It is impossible in some respects not to regret the old practice. It is well that each age should write for itself a faithful account of its habitual existence. We do this to a certain extent in novels, but novels are difficult materials for an historian. They raise a cause and a controversy as to how far they are really faithful delineations. Mr. Macaulay is even now under criticism for his use of the plays of the seventeenth century. Letters are generally true on these points. The least veracious man will tell truly the colour of his coat, the hour of his dinner, the materials of his shoes. The unconscious delineation of a recurring and familiar life is beyond the reach of a fraudulent fancy. Horace Walpole was not a very scrupulous narrator; yet it was too much trouble even for him to tell lies on many points. His set stories and conspicuous scandals are no doubt often unfounded, but there is a gentle undercurrent of daily unremarkable life and manners which he evidently assumed as a datum for his historical imagination. Whence posterity will derive this for the times of Queen Victoria it is difficult to fancy. Even memoirs are no resource; they generally leave out the common life, and try at least to bring out the uncommon events.

It is evident that this species of composition exactly harmonized with the temperament and genius of Cowper. Detail was his forte and quietness his element. Accordingly, his delicate humour plays over perhaps a million letters, mostly descriptive of events which no one else would have

thought worth narrating, and yet which, when narrated, show to us, and will show to persons to whom it will be yet more strange, the familiar, placid, easy, ruminating, provincial existence of our great grandfathers. Slow, Olney might be,—indescribable, it certainly was not. We seem to have lived there ourselves.

The most copious subject of Cowper's correspondence is his translation of Homer. This was published by subscription, and it is pleasant to observe the healthy facility with which one of the shyest men in the world set himself to extract guineas from every one he had ever heard of. In several cases he was very successful. The University of Oxford he tells us, declined, as of course it would, to recognise the principle of subscribing towards literary publications; but other public bodies and many private persons were more generous. It is to be wished that their aid had contributed to the production of a more pleasing work. The fact is, Cowper was not like Agamemnon. The most conspicuous feature in the Greek heroes is a certain brisk, decisive activity, which always strikes and always likes to strike. This quality is faithfully represented in the poet himself. Homer is the briskest of men. The Germans have denied that there was any such person; but they have never questioned his extreme activity. 'From what you tell me, sir,' said an American, 'I should like to have read Homer. I should say he was a go-ahead party.' Now this is exactly what Cowper was not. His genius was domestic, and tranquil, and calm. He had no sympathy, or little sympathy, even with the common, half-asleep activities of a refined society; an evening party was too much for him; a day's hunt a preposterous excitement. It is absurd to expect a man like this to sympathise with the stern stimulants of a barbaric age, with a race who fought because they liked it, and a poet who sang of fighting because he thought their taste judicious. As if to make matters worse, Cowper selected a metre in which it would be scarcely possible for any one, however gifted, to translate Homer. The two kinds of metrical composition most essentially opposed to one another are ballad poetry and blank verse. The very nature of the former requires a marked pause and striking rhythm. Every line should have a distinct end and a clear beginning. It is like martial music, there should be a tramp in the very versification of it:

'Armour rusting in his halls
On the blood of Clifford calls;
"Quell the Scot," exclaims the lance,
Bear me to the heart of France,
Is the longing of the shield:
Tell thy name, thou trembling field,
Field of death, where'er thou be,
Groan thou with our victory.'

And this is the tone of Homer. The grandest of human tongues marches forward with its proudest steps: the clearest tones call forward—the most marked of metres carries him on:—

'Like a reappearing star,
Like a glory from afar—'

he ever heads, and will head, 'the flock of war.' Now blank verse is the exact opposite of all this. Dr. Johnson laid down that it was verse only to the eye, which was a bold dictum. But without going this length it will be safe to say, that of all considerable metres in our language it has the least distinct conclusion, least decisive repetition, the least trumpet-like rhythm; and it is this of which Cowper made choice. He had an idea that extreme literalness was an unequalled advantage, and logically reasoned that it was easier to do this in that metre than in any other. He did not quite hold with Mr. Cobbett that the 'gewgaw fetters of rhyme were invented by the monks to enslave the people;' but as a man who had due experience of both, he was aware that it is easier to write two lines of different endings than two lines of the same ending, and supposed that by taking advantage of this to preserve the exact grammatical meaning of his author, he was indisputably approximating to a good translation. 'Whether,' he writes, 'a translation of Homer may be best executed in blank verse or in rhyme is a question in the decision of which no man finds difficulty who has ever duly considered what translation ought to be, or who is in any degree practically acquainted with those kinds of versification. . . . No human ingenuity can be equal to the task of closing every couplet with sounds homotonous, expressing at the same time the full sense, and only the full sense, of the original.'

And if the true object of translation were to save the labour and dictionaries of construing schoolboys, there is no question but this slavish adherence to the original would be the most likely to gain the approbation of those diminutive but sure judges. But if the object is to convey an idea of the general tone, scope, and artistic effect of the original, the mechanical copying of the details is as likely to end in a good result as a careful cast from a dead man's features to produce a living and speaking being. On the whole, therefore, the condemnation remains, that Homer is not dull, and Cowper is.

With the translation of Homer terminated all the brightest period of Cowper's life. There is little else to say. He undertook an edition of Milton—a most difficult task, involving the greatest and most accurate learning, in theology, in classics, in Italian—in a word, in all ante-Miltonic literature. By far the greater portion of this lay quite out of Cowper's path. He had never been a hard student, and his evident incapacity for the task troubled and vexed him. A man who had never been able to take any real responsibility was not likely to feel comfortable under the weight of a task which very few men indeed would be able to accomplish. Mrs. Unwin too fell into a state of helplessness and despondency; and instead of relying on her for cheerfulness and management, he was obliged to manage for her, and cheer her. His mind was unequal to the task. Gradually the dark cloud of melancholy, which had hung about him so long, grew and grew, and extended itself day by day. In vain Lord Thurlow, who was a likely man to know, assured him that his spiritual despondency was without ground; he smiled sadly, but seemed to think that at any rate he was not going into Chancery. In vain Hayley, a rival poet, but a good-natured, blundering, well-intentioned, incoherent man, went to and fro, getting the Lord Chief Justice and other dignitaries to attest, under their hands, that they concurred in Thurlow's opinion. In vain, with far wiser kindness, his relatives, especially many of his mother's family, from whom he had been long divided, but who gradually drew nearer to him as they were wanted, endeavoured to divert his mind to healthful labour and tranquil society. The day of these things had passed away—the summer was ended. He became quite unequal to original composition, and his greatest pleasure

was hearing his own writings read to him. After a long period of hopeless despondency he died on the 25th of April, in the first year of this century; and if he needs an epitaph, let us say, that not in vain was he Nature's favourite. As a higher poet sings:—

'And all day long I number yet,
All seasons through, another debt,
Which I, wherever thou art met,
To thee am owing;
An instinct call it, a blind sense,
A happy, genial influence,
Coming one knows not how nor whence,
Nor whither going.'

* * * * * *

'If stately passions in me burn,
And one chance look to thee should turn,
I drink out of an humbler urn,
A lowlier pleasure;
The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life, on nature breeds
A wisdom fitted to the needs
Of hearts at leisure.'

APPENDIX I

Letters on the French Coup d'Etat of 1851*

Letter I.

THE DICTATORSHIP OF LOUIS NAPOLEON.

PARIS: Jan. 8, 1852.

MY DEAR SIR,—You have asked me to tell you what I think of French affairs. I shall be pleased to do so; but I ought perhaps to begin by cautioning you against believing, or too much heeding, what I say. However, I do not imagine that I need do so; for with your experience of the public journals, you will be quite aware that it is not difficult to be an "occasional correspondent." Have your boots polished in a blacking-shop, and call the interesting officiator an "intelligent *ouvrier*;" be shaved, and cite the *coiffeur* as "a person in rather a superior station;" call your best acquaintance "a well-informed person," and all others "persons whom I have found to be occasionally not in error" and—abroad, at least—you will soon have matter for a newspaper letter. I should quite deceive you if I professed to have made these profound researches; nor, like Sir Francis Head, "do I no longer know where I am," because the French President has asked me to accompany him in his ride. My perception of personal locality has not as yet been so tried. I only know what a person who is in a foreign country during an important political catastrophe cannot avoid knowing, what he runs against, what is beaten into him, what he can hardly help hearing, seeing, and reflecting.

That Louis Napoleon has gone to Notre Dame to return thanks to God for the seven millions and odd suffrages of the

* From the "Inquirer," January and February, 1852.

French people—that he has taken up his abode at the Tuileries, and that he has had new Napoleons coined in his name—that he has broken up the trees of liberty for firewood —that he has erased, or is erasing (for they are many), *Liberté, Egalité,* and *Fraternité* from the National buildings,— all these things are so easy and so un-English that I am pretty sure with you they will be thought signs of pompous impotence, and I suppose many people will be inclined to believe the best comment to be the one which I heard— "Mon Dieu, il a sauvé la France: la rue du Coq s'appelle maintenant la rue de l'Aigle!"*

I am inclined, however, to imagine that this idea would be utterly erroneous; that, on the contrary, the President is just now, at least, really strong and really popular; that the act of the 2nd of December did succeed and is succeeding; that many, that most, of the inferior people do really and sincerely pray *Domine Salvum fac Napoleonem.*

In what I have seen of the comments of the English press upon recent events here, two things are not quite enough kept apart—I mean the temporary dictatorship of Louis Napoleon to meet and cope with the expected crisis of '52, and the continuance of that distatorship hereafter,—the new, or as it is called the *Bas*-Empire—in a word, the coming Constitution and questionable political machinery with which "the nephew of my uncle" is now proposing to endow France. Of course in reality these two things *are* separate. It is one thing to hold that a military rule is required to meet an urgent and temporary difficulty: another to advocate the continuance of such a system, when so critical a necessity no longer exists.

It seems to me, or would seem, if I did not know that I was contradicted both by much English writing and opinion, and also by many most competent judges here, that the first point, the temporary dictatorship, is a tolerably clear case; that it is not to be complicated with the perplexing inquiry what form of government will permanently suit the French people;—that the President was, under the actual facts of

*The general reader may not before have read, that the Rue du Coq l'Honoré is an old and well-known street in Paris, and that notwithstanding the substitution of the eagle for cock, as a military emblem, there is no thought of changing its name.

the case, quite justified in assuming the responsibility, though of course I allow that responsibility to be tremendous. My reasons for so believing I shall in this letter endeavour to explain, except that I shall not, I fancy, have room to say much on the moral defensibility or indefensibility of the *coup d'état;* nor do I imagine that you want from me any ethical speculation;—that is manufactured in Printing-house-square; but I shall give the best account I can of the matter-of-fact consequences and antecedents of the New Revolution, of which, in some sense, a resident in France may feel without presumption that he knows something hardly so well known to those at home.

The political justification of Louis Napoleon is, as I apprehend, to be found in the state of the public mind which immediately preceded the *coup d'état.* It is very rarely that a country expects a revolution at a given time; indeed, it is perhaps not common for ordinary persons in any country to anticipate a revolution at all; though profound people may speculate, the mass will ever expect to-morrow to be as this day at least, if not more abundant. But once name the day, and all this is quite altered. As a general rule the very people who would be most likely to neglect general anticipation are exactly those most likely to exaggerate the proximate consequences of a certain impending event. At any rate, in France five weeks ago, the tradespeople talked of May '52, as if it were the end of the world. Civilisation and Socialism might probably endure, but buying and selling would surely come to an end; in fact, they anticipated a worse era than February '48, when trade was at a standstill so long that it has hardly yet recovered, and when the Government stocks fell 40 per cent. It is hardly to be imagined upon what petty details the dread of political dissolution at a fixed and not distant time will condescend to intrude itself. I was present when a huge *Flamande,* in appearance so intrepid that I respectfully pitied her husband, came to ask the character of a *bonne.* I was amazed to hear her say, "I hope the girl is strong, for when the revolution comes next May, and I have to turn off my helper, she will have enough to do." It seemed to me that a political apprehension must be pretty general when it affected that most non-speculative of speculations, the *reckoning* of a housewife. With this feeling, everybody

saved their money: who would spend in luxuries that which might so soon be necessary and invaluable! This economy made commerce,—especially the peculiarly Parisian trade which is almost wholly in articles that *can* be spared—worse and worse; the more depressed trade became, the more the traders feared, and the more they feared, the worse all trade inevitably grew.

I apprehend that this feeling extended very generally among all the classes who do not find or make a livelihood by literature or by politics. Among the clever people, who understood the subject, very likely the expectation was extremely different; but among the stupid ones who mind their business, and have a business to mind, there was a universal and excessive tremor. The only notion of '52 was "on se battra dans la rue." Their dread was especially of Socialism; they expected that the followers of M. Proudhon, who advisedly and expressly maintains "anarchy" to be the best form of Government, would attempt to carry out their theories in action, and that the division between the Legislative and Executive power would so cripple the party of order as to make their means of resistance for the moment feeble and difficult to use. The more sensible did not, I own, expect the annihilation of mankind; civilisation dies hard; the organised sense in all countries is strong; but they expected vaguely and crudely that the party which in '93 ruled for many months, and which in June '48 fought so fanatically against the infant republic, would certainly make a desperate attack,—*might* for some short time obtain the upper hand. Of course, it is now matter of mere argument whether the danger was real or unreal, and it is in some quarters rather the fashion to quiz the past fear, and to deny that any Socialists anywhere exist. In spite of the literary exertions of Proudhon and Louis Blanc, in spite of the prison quarrels of Blanqui and Barbès—there are certainly found people who question whether anybody buys the books of the two former, or cares for the incarcerated dissensions of the two latter. But however this may be, it is certain that two days after the *coup d'état* a mass of persons thought it worth while to erect some dozen barricades, and among these, and superintending and directing their every movement, there certainly were, for I saw them myself, men whose physiognomy and accoutrements exactly resembled the traditional

Montagnard, sallow, stern, compressed, with much marked features, which expressed but resisted suffering, and brooding one-ideaed thought, that from their youth upward had for ever imagined, like Jonah, that they did well—immensely well, to be angry,—armed to the teeth, and ready, like the soldiers of the first Republic, to use their arms savagely and well in defence of theories broached by a Robespierre, a Blanqui, or a Barbès, gloomy fanatics, *over*-principled ruffians. I may perhaps be mistaken in reading on their features the characters of such men, but I know that when one of them disturbed my superintendence of barricade-making with a stern *allez vous-en*, it was not too slowly that I departed, for I *felt* that he would rather shoot me than not. Having seen these people, I conceive that they exist. But supposing that they were all simply fabulous, it would not less be certain that they were believed to be, and to be active; nor would it impair the fact that the quiet classes awaited their onslaught in morbid apprehension, with miserable and craven, and I fear we ought to say, *commercial* disquietude.

You will not be misled by any highflown speculations about liberty or equality. You will, I imagine, concede to me that the first duty of a government is to ensure the security of that industry which is the condition of social life and civilised cultivation;—that especially in so excitable a country as France it is necessary that the dangerous classes should be saved from the strong temptation of long idleness; and that no danger could be more formidable than six months' beggary among the revolutionary *ouvriers*, immediately preceding the exact period fixed by European as well as French opinion for an apprehended convulsion. It is from this state of things, whether by fair means or foul, that Louis Napoleon has delivered France. The effect was magical. Like people who have nearly died because it was prophesied they would die at a specified time, and instantly recovered when they found or thought that the time was gone and past. So France, timorously anticipating the fated revolution, in a moment revived when she found or fancied that it was come and over. Commerce instantly improved; New Year's Day, when all the Boulevards are one continued fair, has not (as I am told) been for some years so gay and splendid; people began to buy, and consequently

to sell; for though it is quite possible, or even probable, that new misfortunes and convulsions may be in store for the French people, yet no one can say when they will be, and to wait till revolutions be exhausted is but the best Parisian for our old acquaintance *Rusticus expectat*. Clever people may now prove that the dreaded peril was a simple chimera, but they can't deny that the fear of it was very real and painful, nor can they dispute that in a week after the *coup d'état* it had at once, and apparently for ever, passed away.

I fear it must be said that no legal or constitutional act could have given an equal confidence. What was wanted was the assurance of an audacious Government, which would stop at nothing, scruple at nothing, to secure its own power and the tranquillity of the country. That assurance all now have; a man who will in this manner dare to dissolve an assembly constitutionally his superiors, then prevent their meeting by armed force; so well and so sternly repress the first beginning of an outbreak, with so little misgiving assume and exercise sole power,—may have enormous other defects, but is certainly a bold ruler—most probably an unscrupulous one—little likely to flinch from any inferior trial.

Of Louis Napoleon, whose personal qualities are, for the moment, so important, I cannot now speak at length. But I may say that, with whatever other deficiencies, he has one excellent advantage over other French statesmen—he has never been a professor, nor a journalist, nor a promising barrister, nor, by taste, a *littérateur*. He has not confused himself with history; he does not think in leading articles, in long speeches, or in agreeable essays. But he is capable of observing facts rightly, of reflecting on them simply, and acting on them discreetly. And his motto is Danton's, *De l'audace et toujours de l'audace*, and this you know, according to Bacon, in time of revolution, will carry a man far, perhaps even to ultimate victory, and that ever-future millennium "*la consolidation de la France*."

But on these distant questions I must not touch. I have endeavoured to show you what was the crisis, how strong the remedy, and what the need of a dictatorship. I hope to have convinced you that the first was imminent, the second effectual, and the last expedient. I remain yours,

AMICUS.

Letter II.

THE MORALITY OF THE COUP D'ETAT.

Paris: Jan. 15, 1852.

My Dear Sir,—I know quite well what will be said about, or in answer to, my last letter. It will be alleged that I think everything in France is to be postponed to the Parisian commerce—that a Constitution, Equality, Liberty, a Representative Government, are all to be set aside if they interfere even for a moment with the sale of *étrennes* or the manufacture of gimcracks.

I, as you know, hold no such opinions; it would not be necessary for me to undeceive you, who would, I rather hope, never suspect me of *that* sort of folly. But as St. Athanasius aptly observes, "for the sake of the women who may be led astray, I will this very instant explain my sentiments."

Contrary to Sheridan's rule, I commence by a concession. I certainly admit, indeed I would, upon occasion, maintain, *boutons* and bracelets to be things less important than common law and Constitutional action. A *coup d'état* would, I may allow, be mischievously supererogatory if it only promoted the enjoyment of what a lady in the highest circles is said to call "bigotry and virtue." But the real question is not to be so disposed of. The Parisian trade, the jewellery, the baubles, the silks, the luxuries, which the Exhibition showed us to be the characteristic industry of France, are very dust in the balance if weighed against the hands and arms which their manufacture employs—the industrial habits which their regular sale rewards—the hunger and idle weariness which the certain demand for them prevents. For this is the odd peculiarity of commercial civilisation. The life, the welfare, the existence of thousands depend on their being paid for doing what seems nothing when done. That gorgeous dandies should wear gorgeous studs—that pretty girls should be prettily dressed—that pleasant drawing-rooms should be pleasantly attired—may seem, to people of our age, sad trifling. But grave as we are, we must become graver still when we reflect on the horrid suffering the sudden cessation of large luxurious consumption would certainly create, if we imagine such a city as Lyons to be, without

warning, turned out of work, and the population feelingly told "to cry in the streets when no man regardeth."

The first duty of society is the preservation of society. By the sound work of old-fashioned generations—by the singular painstaking of the slumberers in churchyards—by dull care—by stupid industry, a certain social fabric somehow exists; people contrive to go out to their work, and to find work to employ them actually until the evening, body and soul are kept together, and this is what mankind have to show for their six thousand years of toil and trouble.

To keep up this system we must sacrifice everything. Parliaments, liberty, leading articles, essays, eloquence,—all are good, but they are secondary; at all hazards, and if we can, mankind must be kept alive. And observe, as time goes on, this fabric becomes a tenderer and a tenderer thing. Civilisation can't bivouac; dangers, hardships, sufferings, lightly borne by the coarse muscle of earlier times, are soon fatal to noble and cultivated organisation. Women in early ages are masculine, and, as a return match, the men of late years are becoming women. The strong apprehension of a Napoleonic invasion has, perhaps now caused more substantial misery in England than once the wars of the Roses.

To apply this "creed of doctrine" to the condition of France. I do not at all say that, but for the late *coup d'état*, French civilisation would certainly have soon come to a final end. *Some* people might have continued to take their meals. Even Socialism would hardly abolish *eau sucrée*. But I do assert that, according to the common belief of the common people, their common comforts were in considerable danger. The debasing torture of acute apprehension was eating into the crude pleasure of stupid lives. No man liked to take a long bill; no one could imagine to himself what was coming. Fear was paralysing life and labour, and as I said at length, in my last, fear, so intense, whether at first reasonable or unreasonable, will, ere long, invincibly justify itself. May 1852 would, in all likelihood, have been an evil and bloody time, if it had been preceded by six months' famine among the starvable classes.

At present all is changed. Six weeks ago society was living from hand to mouth; now she feels sure of her next meal. And this, in a dozen words, is the real case—the

political excuse for Prince Louis Napoleon. You ask me, or I should not do so, to say a word or two on the moral question and the oath. You are aware how limited my means of doing so are. I have forgotten Paley, and have never read the Casuists. But it certainly does not seem to me proved or clear, that a man who has sworn, even in the most solemn manner, to see another drown, is therefore quite bound, or even at liberty, to stand placidly on the bank. What Ethical philosopher has demonstrated this? Coleridge said it was difficult to advance a new error in morals,—yet this, I think, would be one; and the keeping of oaths is peculiarly a point of mere science, for Christianity, in terms at least, only forbids them all. And supposing I am right, such certainly was the exact position of Louis Napoleon. He saw society, I will not say dying or perishing—for I hate unnecessarily to overstate any point,—in danger of incurring extreme and perhaps lasting calamities,—calamities likely not only to impair the happiness, but moreover to debase the character of the French nation, and these calamities he could prevent. Now who has shown that ethics require of him to have held his hand?

The severity with which the riot was put down on the first Thursday in December has, I observe, produced an extreme effect in England; with our happy exemption from martial bloodshed, it must, of course, do so. But better one *émeute* now than many in May, be it ever remembered. There are things more demoralising than death, and among these is the sickly-apprehensive suffering for long months of an entire people.

Of course you understand that I am not holding up Louis Napoleon as a complete standard either of ethical scrupulosity or disinterested devotedness; veracity has never been the family failing—for the great Emperor was a still greater liar. And he has been long playing what, morality apart, is the greatest political misfortune to any statesman—a visibly selfish game. Very likely, too, the very high heroes of history—a Washington, an Aristides, by Carlyle profanely called "favourites of Dryasdust," would have extricated the country more easily, and perhaps more completely, from its scrape. Their ennobling rectitude would have kept M. de Girardin consistent, and induced M. Thiers to vote for the

Revision of the Constitution; and even though, as of old, the Mountain were deafer than the uncharmed adder, a sufficient number of self-seeking Conservatives might have been induced by perfect confidence in a perfect President, to mend a crotchetty performance, that was visibly ruining, what the poet calls, "The ever-ought-to-be-conserved-thing," their country.

I remember reading, several years ago, an article in the *Westminster Review*, on the lamented Armand Carrel, in which the author, well known to be one of our most distinguished philosophers, took occasion to observe, that what the French most wanted was, "*un homme de caractère*," Everybody is aware —for all except myself know French quite perfectly—that this expression is not by any means equivalent to our common phrase, a "man of character," or "respectable individual," it does not at all refer to mere goodness; it is more like what we sometimes say of an eccentric country gentleman, "He is a character;" for it denotes a singular preponderance of peculiar qualities, an accomplished obstinacy, an inveterate fixedness of resolution and idea that enables him to get done what he undertakes. The Duke of Wellington is "*par excellence, homme de caractère;*" Lord Palmerston rather so; Mr. Cobden a little; Lord John not at all. Now exactly this, beyond the immense majority of educated men, Louis Napoleon is, as a pointed writer describes him;—"the President is a superior man, but his superiority is of the sort that is hidden under a dubious exterior; his life is entirely internal; his speech does not betray his inspiration; his gesture does not copy his audacity; his look does not reflect his ardour; his step does not reveal his resolution; his whole mental nature is in some sort repressed by his physical: he thinks and does not discuss; he decides and does not deliberate; he acts without agitation; he speaks, and assigns no reason; his best friends are unacquainted with him; he obtains their confidence, but never asks it." Also his whole nature is, and has been, absorbed in the task which he has undertaken. For many months, his habitual expression has been exactly that of a gambler who is playing for his highest and last stake; in society it is said to be the same—a general and diffusive politeness, but an ever-ready reflection and a constant reserve. His great qualities are rather peculiar. He is not like his uncle, a creative genius, who will leave behind him social

institutions, such as those which nearly alone, in this changeful country, seem to be always exempt from every change; he will suggest little; he has hardly an organising mind; but he will coolly estimate his own position and that of France; he will observe all dangers and compute all chances. He can act—he can be idle: he may work what is; he may administer the country. Any how—*il fera son possible*, and you know, in the nineteenth century, how much and how rare that is.

I see many people are advancing beautiful but untrue ethics about his private character. Thus I may quote as follows from a very estimable writer:—" On the 15th October, he requested his passports and left Aremberg for London. In this capital he remained from the end of 1838, to the month of August 1840. In these twenty months, instead of learning to command armies and govern empires, his days and nights, when not given to frivolous pleasures, were passed on the turf, in the betting-room, or in clubs where high play and desperate stakes roused the jaded energy of the *blasé* gambler."—(A. V. Kirwan, Esq., Barrister-at-Law, in *Fraser's Magazine*.)

The notion of this gentleman clearly is, that a betting man can't in nature be a good statesman; that horse-racing is providentially opposed to political excellence; that " by a interesting illustration of the argument from design, we notice an antithesis alike marvellous and inevitable," between turf and tariffs. But, setting Paley for a moment apart, how is a man, by circumstances excluded from military and political life, and by birth from commercial pursuits, really and effectually to learn administration? Mr. Kirwan imagines that he should read all through Burke, common-place Tacitus, collate Cicero, and annotate Montesquieu. Yet take an analogous case. Suppose a man, shut out from trading life, is to qualify himself for the practical management of a counting-house. Do you fancy he will do it " by a judicious study of the principles of political economy," and by elaborately re-reading Adam Smith and John Mill? He had better be at Newmarket, and devote his *heures perdues* to the Oaks and the St. Leger. He may learn there what he will never acquire from literary study,—the instinctive habit of applied calculation, which is essential to a merchant and extremely useful to a statesman. Where, too, did Sir Robert Walpole learn business, or Charles Fox, or anybody in the 18th century? And after all, M. Michel de

Bourges gave the real solution of the matter. "Louis Napoleon," said the best orator of the Mountain, "may have had rather a stormy youth (laughter). But don't suppose that any one in all France imagines you, you *Messieurs*, of the immaculate majority, to be the least better (sensation). I am not speaking to saints" (uproar). If compared with contemporary French statesmen, and the practical choice is between him and them, the President will not seem what he appears when measured by the notions of a people who exact at least from inferior functionaries *a rigid decorum in the pettiest details of their private morals*. I have but one last point to make about this *coup d'état*, and then I will release you from my writing. I do not know whether you in England rightly realise the French Socialism.

Take, for instance, M. Proudhon, who is perhaps their ideal and perfect type. He was *représentant de la Seine* in the late Assembly, elected, which is not unimportant, after the publication of his books and on account of his opinions. In his "Confessions d'un Révolutionnaire," a very curious book—for he writes extremely well—after maintaining that our well-known but, as we imagine, advanced friends, Ledru Rollin, and Louis Blanc, and Barbès, and Blanqui are all *reactionnaires*, and clearly showing, to the grief of mankind, that once the legislator of the Luxembourg wished to preserve "equilibrium," and the author of the provincial circulars to maintain the "tranquillity," he gives the following *bonâ fide* and amusing account of his own investigations:—"I commenced my task of solitary conspiracy by the study of the socialisms of antiquity, necessary, in my judgment, to determine the law, whether practical or theoretical, of progress. These socialisms I found in the Bible. A memoir on the institution of the Sabbath—considered with regard to morals, to health, and in its relation to the family and the city—procured for me a bronze medal from my academy. From the faith in which I had been reared, I had precipitated myself head-long, head-foremost, into pure reason, and already, what was wonderful and a good omen, when I made Moses a philosopher and a socialist, I was greeted with applause. If I am now in error, the fault is not merely mine. Was there ever a similar seduction?

"But I studied, above all, with a view to action. I cared little for academical laurels. I had no leisure to become *savant*,

yet less a *litterateur* or an archæologist. I began immediately upon political economy.

"I had assumed as the rule of my investigations that every principle which, pushed to its consequences, should end in a contradiction, must be considered false and null; and that if this principle had been developed into an institution, the institution itself must be considered as factitious, as utopian.

"Furnished with this criterion, I chose for the subject of investigation what I found in society the most ancient, the most respectable, the most universal, the least controverted,—property. Everybody knows what happened; after a long, a minute, and, above all, an impartial analysis, I arrived, as an algebraist guided by his equations, to this surprising conclusion. Property, consider it as you will,—refer it to what principle you may, is a contradictory idea; and as the denial of property carries with it of necessity that of authority, I deduced immediately from my first axiom also this corollary, not less paradoxical, the true form of government is *anarchy*. Lastly, finding by a mathematical demonstration that no amelioration in the economy of society could be arrived at by its natural constitution, or without the concurrence and reflective adhesion of its members; observing, also, that there is a definite epoch in the life of societies, in which their progress, at first unreflecting, requires the intervention of the free reason of man, I concluded that this spontaneous and impulsive force (*cette force d'impulsion spontanée*), which we call Providence, is not everything in the affairs of this world: from that moment, without being an Atheist, I ceased to worship God. He'll get on without your so doing, said to me one day the *Constitutionnel*. Well: perhaps he may." These theories have been expanded into many and weary volumes, and condensed into the famous phrase, "La Propriété c'est le vol;" and have procured their author, in his own sect, reputation and authority.

The *Constitutionnel* had another hit against M. Proudhon, a day or two ago. They presented their readers with two decrees in due official form (the walls were at the moment covered with those of the 2nd of December), as the last ideal of what the straightest sect of the Socialists particularly desire. It was as follows:—"Nothing any longer exists.

"Nobody is charged with the execution of the aforesaid decree. Signed, Vacuum." Such is the speculation of the

new reformers—what their practice would be I can hardly tell you. My feeble income does not allow me to travel to the Basses Alpes and really investigate the subject; but if one quarter of the stories in circulation are in the least to be believed (we are quite dependent on oral information, for the Government papers deal in asterisks and "details unfit for publication," and the rest are devoted to the state of the navy, and say nothing) the atrocities rival the nauseous corruption of what our liberal essayist calls "Jacobin carrion," the old days of Carrier and Barère. This is what people here are afraid of; and that is why I write such things,—and not to horrify you, or amuse you, or bore you—anything rather than that; and they think themselves happy in finding a man who, with or without whatever other qualities or defects, will keep them from the vaunted Millennium and much-expected *Jacquerie*. I hope you think so too—and that I am not, as they say in my native Tipperary, "Whistling jigs to a milestone." I am, my dear sir, yours truly, AMICUS.

P.S.—You will perhaps wish me to say something on the great event of this week, the exile of the more dangerous members of the late Assembly, and the transportation of the Socialists to Cayenne. Both measures were here expected; though I think that both lists are more numerous than was anticipated: but no one really knew what would be done by this silent Government. You will laugh at me when I tell you that both measures have been well received: but, properly limited and understood, I am persuaded that the fact is so. Of course, among the friends of exiled *représentants*, among the *littérateurs* throughout whose ranks these measures are intended to "strike terror and inspire respect," you would hear that there never was such tyranny since the beginning of mankind. But among the mass of the industrious classes—between whom and the politicians there is internecine war—I fancy that on turning the conversation to either of the most recent events, you would hear something of this sort:—"*Ça ne m'occupe pas.*" "What is that *to me?*" "*Je suis pour la tranquillité, moi.*" "I sold four brooches yesterday." The Socialists who have been removed from prison to the colony, it is agreed were "pestilent fellows perverting the nation," and forbidding to pray tribute to M. Bonaparte. Indeed they can hardly expect

commercial sympathy. "Our national honour rose—our stocks fell," is Louis Blanc's perpetual comment on his favourite events, and it is difficult to say which of its two clauses he dwells upon with the intenser relish. It is generally thought by those who think about the matter, that both the transportation, and, in all cases, certainly, the exile will only be a temporary measure, and that the great mass of the people in both lists will be allowed to return to their homes when the present season of extreme excitement has passed over. Still I am not prepared to defend the *number* of the transportations. That strong measures of the sort were necessary I make no doubt. If Socialism exist, and the fear of it exist, something must be done to reassure the people. You will understand that it is not a judicial proceeding either in essence or in form; it is not to be considered as a punishment for what men have done, but as a perfect precaution against what they may do. Certainly it is to be regretted that the cause of order is so weak as to need such measures; but if it *is* so weak, the Government must no doubt take them. Of course however "our brethren" who are retained in such numbers to write down Prince Louis, are quite right to use without stint or stopping this most un-English proceeding; it is their case, and you and I from old misdeeds know pretty well how it is to be managed. There will be no imputation of reasonable or humane motives to the Government, and no examination of the existing state of France:—let both these come from the other side—but elegiac eloquence is inexhaustibly exuded—the cruel corners of history are ransacked for petrifying precedents—and I observe much excellent weeping on the Cromwellian deportations and the ten years' exile of Madame de Staël. But after all they have missed the tempting parallel—I mean the "rather long" proscription list which Octavius—"*l'ancien neveu de l'ancien oncle*"—concocted with Mark Antony in the marshes of Bononia, and whereby they thoroughly purged old Rome of its turbulent and revolutionary elements. I suspect our estimable contemporaries regret to remember of how much good order, long tranquillity, "*beata pleno copia cornu*" and other many "little comforts" to the civilised world that very "strong" proceeding, whether in ethics justifiable or not, certainly was in fact the beginning and foundation.

The fate of the African generals is much to be regretted, and

the Government will incur much odium if the exile of General Changarnier is prolonged any length of time. He is doubtless "dangerous" for the moment, for his popularity with the army is considerable, and he divides the party of order; he is also a practical man and an unpleasant enemy, but he is much respected and little likely (I fancy) to attempt anything against any settled Government.

As for M. Thiers and M. Emile de Girardin—the ablest of the exiles—I have heard no one pity them; they have played a selfish game—they have encountered a better player—they have been beaten—and this is the whole matter. You will remember that it was the adhesion of these two men that procured for M. Bonaparte a large part of his *first* six millions. M. de Girardin, whom General Cavaignac had discreetly imprisoned and indiscreetly set free, wrote up the "opposition candidate" daily, in the *Presse* (he has since often and often tried to write him down), and M. Thiers was his Privy Councillor. "*Mon cher Prince*," they say, said the latter, "your address to the people won't do at all. I'll get one of the *rédacteurs* of the *Constitutionnel* to draw you up something tolerable." You remember the easy patronage with which Cicero speaks in his letter of the "boy" that was outwitting him all the while. But, however, observe I do not at all, notwithstanding my Latin, insinuate or assert that Louis Napoleon, though a considerable man, is exactly equal to keep the footsteps of Augustus. A feeble parody may suffice for an inferior stage and not too gigantic generation. Now I really *have* done.

Letter III.

ON THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF FRANCE, AND THE APTITUDE OF THE FRENCH CHARACTER FOR NATIONAL FREEDOM.

Paris, 20th January, 1852.

Sir,—We have now got our Constitution. The Napoleonic era has commenced; the term of the dictatorship is fixed and the consolidation of France is begun. You will perhaps anticipate from the conclusion of the last letter, that *apropos*

of this great event, I should gratify you with bright anticipations of an Augustan age, and a quick revival of Catonic virtue, with an assurance that the night is surely passed and the day altogether come, with a solemn invocation to the rising luminary, and an original panegyric on the "golden throned morning."

I must always regret to disappoint anyone; but I feel obliged to entertain you instead with torpid philosophy, constitutional details, and a dull disquisition on national character.

The details of the new institutions you will have long ago learnt from the daily papers. I believe they may be fairly and nearly accurately described as the Constitution of the Consulate, *minus* the ideas of the man that made it. You will remember that, besides the First Magistrate, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Council of State (which we may call, in legal language, the "common form" of continental constitution), the ingenious Abbe Sieyés had devised some four principal peculiarities, which were to be remembered to all time as master pieces of political invention. These were the utter inaction of the First Magistrate, copied, as I believe, from the English Constitution—the subordination to him of two Consuls, one to administer peace and the other war, who were intended to be the real hands and arms of the Government—the silence of the Senate—the double and very peculiar election of the House of Representatives. Napoleon the Great, as we are now to speak, struck out the first of these, being at the moment working some fifteen hours a day at the reorganisation of France. He said plainly and rather sternly that he had no intention of doing nothing—the *ideologue* went to the wall—the "excellent idea" put forth in happy forgetfulness of real facts and real people was instantly abandoned—for the Grand Elector was substituted a First Consul, who, so far from being nothing, was very soon the whole Government. Napoleon the Little, as I fear the Parisian multitude may learn to call him, has effaced the other three "strokes of statesmanship." The new Constitution of France is exactly the "common form" of political conveyancing, *plus* the *Idée Napoléonienne* of an all-suggesting and all-administering mind.

I have extremely little to tell you about its reception; it has made no "sensation," not so much as even the "fortified camps" which his Grace is said to be devising for the defence

of our own London. Indeed, "*Il a peur*" is a very common remark (conceivable to everybody who knows "the Duke"), and it would seem even a refreshing alleviation of their domestic sorrows. In fact, home politics are now *the* topic; geography and the state of foreign institutions are not, indeed, the true Parisian line—but it has, in fine, been distinctly discovered that there are no *salons* in Cayenne, which, once certain, the logical genius of the nation, with incredible swiftness, deduced the clear conclusion that it was better not to go there. Seriously, I fancy—for I have no data on which to found real knowledge of so delicate a point—the new Constitution is regarded merely as what Father Newman would call a "preservative addition" or a "necessary development," essential to the "chronic continuance" of the Napoleonic system; for the moment the mass of the people wish the President to govern them, but they don't seem to me to care how. The political people, I suppose, hate it, because for some time it will enable him, if not shot, to govern effectually. I say if not shot—for people are habitually recounting under their breath some new story of an attempt at assassination, which the papers suppress. I am inclined to think that these rumours are pure lies; but they show the feeling. You know, according to the Constitution of 1848, the President would now be a mere outlaw, and whoever finds him may slay him if he can. It is true that the elaborate masterpiece of M. Marrast is already fallen into utter oblivion (it is no more remembered than yesterday's *Times*, or the political institutions of Saxon Mercia); but nevertheless such, according to the antediluvian *régime*, would be the law, and it is possible that a mindful Montagnard may upon occasion recall even so insignificant a circumstance.

I have a word to say on the Prologue of the President. When I first began to talk politics with French people, I was much impressed by the fact to which he has there drawn attention. You know that all such conversation, when one of the interlocutors is a foreigner, speaking slowly and but imperfectly the language of the country in which he is residing, is pretty much in the style of that excellent work which was the terror of our childhood—Joyce's "Scientific Dialogues"—wherein, as you may remember, an accomplished tutor,

with a singular gift of scholastic improvisation, instructs a youthful pupil exceedingly given to feeble questions and auscultatory repose. Now, when I began in Parisian society thus to enact the *rôle* of "George" or "Caroline," I was, I repeat, much struck with the fact that the Emperor had done everything; to whatever subject my diminutive inquiry related, the answer was nearly universally the same—an elegy on Napoleon. Nor is this exactly absurd; for whether or not "the nephew" is right in calling the uncle the greatest of modern statesmen, he is indisputably the modern statesman who has founded the greatest number of existing institutions. In the pride of philosophy and in the madness of an hour, the Constituent Assembly and the Convention swept away not only the monstrous abuses of the old *régime*, but that *régime* itself—its essence and its mechanism, utterly and entirely. They destroyed whatever they could lay their hands on. The consequence was certain—when they tried to construct they found they had no materials. They left a vacuum. No greater benefit could have been conferred on politicians gifted with the creative genius of Napoleon. It was like the fire of London to Sir Christopher Wren. With a fertility of invention and an obstinacy in execution, equalling, if not surpassing, those of Cæsar and Charlemagne, he had before him an open stage, more clear and more vast than in historical times fortune has ever offered to any statesman. He was nearly in the position of the imagined legislator of the Greek legends and the Greek philosophers—he could enact any law, and rescind any question. Accordingly, the educational system, the banking system, the financial system, the municipal system, the administrative system, the civil legislation, the penal legislation, the commercial legislation (besides all manner of secondary creations—public buildings and public institutions without number), all date from the time, and are more or less deeply inscribed with the genius, the firm will, and unresting energies of Napoleon. And this, which is the great strength of the present President, is the great difficulty—I fear the insurmountable difficulty—in the way of Henry the Fifth. The first revolution is to the French what the deluge is to the rest of mankind; the whole system then underwent an entire change. A French politician will no more cite as authority the domestic policy of Colbert

or Louvois than we should think of going for ethics and æsthetics to the bigamy of Lamech, or the musical accomplishments of Tubal Cain. If the Comte de Chambord be (as it is quite on the cards that he may be), within a few years restored, he must govern by the instrumentality of laws and systems, devised by the politicians whom he execrates and denounces, and devised, moreover, often enough, especially to keep out him and his. It is difficult to imagine that a strong Government can be composed of materials so inharmonious. Meanwhile, to the popular imagination, "the Emperor" is the past; the House of Bourbon is as historical as the House of Valois; a peasant is little oftener reminded of the "third dynasty" than of the long-haired kings.

In discussing any Constitution, there are two ideas to be first got rid of. The first is the idea of our barbarous ancestors —now happily banished from all civilised society, but still prevailing in old manor-houses, in rural parsonages, and other curious repositories of mouldering ignorance, and which in such arid solitudes is thus expressed; "Why can't they have Kings, Lords and Commons, *like we have*? What fools foreigners are." The second pernicious mistake is, like the former, seldom now held upon system, but so many hold it in bits and fragments, and without system, that it is still rather formidable. I allude to the old idea which still here creeps out in conversation, and sometimes in writing,—that politics are simply a subdivision of immutable ethics; that there are certain rights of men in all places and all times, which are the sole and sufficient foundation of all government, and that accordingly a single stereotype government is to make the tour of the world—and you have no more right to deprive a Dyak of his vote in a "possible" Polynesian Parliament, than you have to steal his mat.

Burke first taught the world at large, in opposition to both, and especially to the latter of these notions, that politics are made of time and place—that institutions are shifting things, to be tried by and adjusted to the shifting conditions of a mutable world—that, in fact, politics are but a piece of business—to be determined in every case by the exact exigencies of that case: in plain English—by sense and circumstances.

This was a great step in political philosophy—though it

now seems the events of 1848 have taught thinking persons (I fancy) further. They have enabled us to say that of all these circumstances so affecting political problems, by far and out of all question the most important is *national character*. In that year the same experiment—the experiment, as its friends say, of Liberal and Constitutional Government—as its enemies say, of Anarchy and Revolution—was tried in every nation of Europe—with what varying futures and differing results! The effect has been to teach men—not only speculatively to know, but practically to feel, that no absurdity is so great as to imagine the same species of institutions suitable or possible for Scotchmen and Sicilians, for Germans and Frenchmen, for the English and the Napolese. With a well-balanced national character (we now know) liberty is a stable thing. A really practical people will work in political business, as in private business, almost the absurdest, the feeblest, the most inconsistent set of imaginable regulations. Similarly, or rather reversely, the best institutions will not keep right a nation that *will* go wrong. Paper is but paper, and no virtue is to be discovered in it to retain within due boundaries the undisciplined passions of those who have never set themselves seriously to restrain them. In a word—as people of "large roundabout common-sense" will (as a rule) somehow get on in life—(no matter what their circumstances or their fortunes)—so a nation which applies good judgment, forbearance, a rational and compromising habit to the management of free institutions, will certainly succeed; while the more eminently gifted national character will but be a source and germ of endless and disastrous failure, if, with whatever other eminent qualities, it be deficient in these plain, solid, and essential requisites.

The formation of *this* character is one of the most secret of marvellous mysteries. Why nations have the character we see them to have is, speaking generally, as little explicable to our shallow perspicacity, as why individuals, our friends or our enemies, for good or for evil, have the character which they have; why one man is stupid and another clever —why another volatile and a fourth consistent—this man by instinct generous, that man by instinct niggardly. I am not speaking of actions, you observe, but of tendencies and temptations. These and other similar problems daily crowd

on our observation in millions and millions, and only do not puzzle us because we are too familiar with their difficulty to dream of attempting their solution. Only this much is most certain, all men and all nations have a character, and that character, when once taken, is, I do not say unchangeable —religion modifies it, catastrophe annihilates it—but the least changeable thing in this ever-varying and changeful world. Take the soft mind of the boy, and (strong and exceptional aptitudes and tendencies excepted) you may make him merchant, barrister, butcher, baker, surgeon, or apothecary. But once make him an apothecary, and he will never afterwards bake wholesome bread—make him a butcher, and he will kill too extensively, even for a surgeon—make him a barrister, and he will be dim on double entry, and crass on bills of lading. Once conclusively form him to one thing, and no art and no science will ever twist him to another. Nature, says the philosopher, has no Delphic daggers!—no men or maids of all work—she keeps one being to one pursuit—to each is a single choice afforded, but no more again thereafter for ever. And it is the same with nations. The Jews of to-day are the Jews in face and form of the Egyptian sculptures; in character they are the Jews of Moses—the negro is the negro of a thousand years—the Chinese, by his own account, is the mummy of a million. "Races and their varieties," says the historian, "seem to have been created with an inward *nisus* diminishing with the age of the world." The people of the South are yet the people of the South, fierce and angry as their summer sun—the people of the North are still cold and stubborn like their own North wind—the people of the East "mark not, but are still"—the people of the West "are going through the ends of the earth, and walking up and down in it." The fact is certain, the cause beyond us. The subtle system of obscure causes, whereby sons and daughters resemble not only their fathers and mothers, but even their great-great-grandfathers and their great-great-grandmothers, may very likely be destined to be very inscrutable. But as the fact is so, so moreover, in history, nations have one character, one set of talents, one list of temptations, and one duty, to use the one and get the better of the other. There are breeds in the animal man just as in the animal dog. When you hunt with grey-

hounds and course with beagles, then, and not till then, may you expect the inbred habits of a thousand years to pass away, that Hindoos can be free, or that Englishmen will be slaves.

I need not prove to you that the French *have* a national character. Nor need I try your patience with a likeness of it. I have only to examine whether it be a fit basis for national freedom. I fear you will laugh when I tell you what I conceive to be about the most essential mental quality for a free people, whose liberty is to be progressive, permanent, and on a large scale; it is much *stupidity*. I see you are surprised—you are going to say to me, as Socrates did to Polus, "My young friend, of *course* you are right; but will you explain what you mean?—as yet you are not intelligible." I will do so as well as I can, or endeavour to make good what I say—not by an *a priori* demonstration of my own, but from the details of the present, and the facts of history. Not to begin by wounding any present susceptibilities, let me take the Roman character—for, with one great exception—I need not say to whom I allude—they are the great political people of history. Now, is not a certain dullness their most visible characteristic? What is the history of their speculative mind?—a blank. What their literature?—a copy. They have left not a single discovery in any abstract science; not a single perfect or well-formed work of high imagination. The Greeks, the perfection of narrow and accomplished genius, bequeathed to mankind the ideal forms of self-idolising art—the Romans imitated and admired; the Greeks explained the laws of nature—the Romans wondered and despised; the Greeks invented a system of numerals second only to that now in use—the Romans counted to the end of their days with the clumsy apparatus which we still call by their name; the Greeks made a capital and scientific calendar—the Romans began their month when the Pontifex Maximus happened to spy out the new moon. Throughout Latin literature, this is the perpetual puzzle—Why are we free and they slaves? we prætors and they barbers? Why do the stupid people always win, and the clever people always lose? I need not say that, in real sound stupidity, the English are unrivalled. You'll hear more wit, and better wit, in an Irish street row than would keep Westminster Hall in humour for

five weeks. Or take Sir Robert Peel—our last great statesman, the greatest Member of Parliament that ever lived, an absolutely perfect transacter of public business—the type of the nineteenth century Englishman as Sir R. Walpole was of the eighteenth. Was there ever such a dull man? Can any one, without horror, foresee the reading of his memoirs? A *clairvoyante*, with the book shut, may get on; but who now, in the flesh, will ever endure the open *vision* of endless recapitulation of interminable Hansard. Or take Mr. Tennyson's inimitable description:—

> "No little lily-handed Baronet he,
> A great broad-shouldered genial Englishman,
> A lord of fat prize oxen and of sheep,
> A pamphleteer on guano and on grain,
> A quarter sessions chairman, abler none."

Whose company so soporific? His talk is of truisms and bullocks; his head replete with rustic visions of mutton and turnips, and a cerebral edition of Burn's "Justice!" Notwithstanding, he is the salt of the earth, the best of the English breed. Who is like him for sound sense? But I must restrain my enthusiasm. You don't want me to tell you that a Frenchman—a real Frenchman—can't be stupid; *esprit* is his essence, wit is to him as water, *bons-mots* as *bon-bons*. He reads and he learns by reading; levity and literature are essentially his line. Observe the consequence. The outbreak of 1848 was accepted in every province in France; the decrees of the Parisian mob were received and registered in all the municipalities of a hundred cities; the Revolution ran like the fluid of the telegraph down the *Chemin de fer du Nord;* it stopped at the Belgian frontier. Once brought into contact with the dull phlegm of the stupid Fleming, the poison was powerless. You remember what the Norman butler said to Wilkin Flammock, of the fulling mills, at the castle of the Garde Douloureuse: "that draught which will but warm your Flemish hearts, will put wildfire into Norman brains; and what may only encourage your countrymen to man the walls, will make ours fly over the battlements." *Les braves Belges*, I make no doubt, were quite pleased to observe what folly was being exhibited by those very clever French, whose tongue they want to speak, and whose literature they try to

imitate. In fact, what we opprobriously call stupidity, though not an enlivening quality in common society, is nature's favourite resource for preserving steadiness of conduct and consistency of opinion. It enforces concentration; people who learn slowly, learn only what they must. The best security for people's doing their duty is that they should not know anything else to do; the best security for fixedness of opinion is that people should be incapable of comprehending what is to be said on the other side. These valuable truths are no discoveries of mine. They are familiar enough to people whose business it is to know them. Hear what a dense and aged attorney says of your peculiarly promising barrister:—"Sharp! oh yes, yes! he's too sharp by half. He is not *safe*; not a minute, isn't that young man." "What style, sir," asked of an East India Director some youthful aspirant for literary renown, "is most to be preferred in the composition of official despatches?" "My good fellow," responded the ruler of Hindostan, "the style *as we* like is the Humdrum." I extend this, and advisedly maintain that nations, just as individuals, may be too clever to be practical, and not dull enough to be free.

How far this is true of the French, and how far the gross deficiency I have indicated is modified by their many excellent qualities, I hope at a future time to inquire.

I am, my dear sir, yours truly,

AMICUS.

LETTER IV.

ON THE APTITUDE OF THE FRENCH CHARACTER FOR NATIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT.

Paris: Jan. 29th, 1852.

MY DEAR SIR,—There is a simple view of the subject on which I wrote to you last week that I wish to bring under your notice. The experiment (as it is called) of establishing political freedom in France is now sixty years old; and the best that we can say of it is, that it is an experiment still. There have been perhaps half-a-dozen new beginnings—half-a-dozen complete failures. I am aware that each of

these failures can be excellently explained—each beginning shown to be quite necessary. But there are certain reasonings which, though outwardly irrefragable, the crude human mind is always most unwilling to accept. Among these are different and subtle explications of several apparently similar facts. Thus, to choose an example suited to the dignity of my subject, when a gentleman from town takes a day's shooting in the country, and should chance (as has happened) at first going off, to miss some six times running, how luminously soever he may "explain" each failure as it occurs, "how expanded a view" he may take of the whole series, whatever popular illustrations of projectile philosophy he may propound to the bird-slaying agriculturists—the impression on the crass intelligence of the gamekeeper will quite clearly be "He beint noo shot homsoever—aint thickeer." Similarly, to compare small things with great, when I myself read in Thiers and other the many phliosophic historians of this literary country, various and excellent explanations of their many mischances;—of the failure of the constitution of 1791—of the constitution of the year 3—of the constitution of the year 5—of the *charte*—of the system of 1830—and now we may add, of the second republic—the annotated constitution of M. Dupin,—I can't help feeling a suspicion lingering in my crude and uncultivated intellect—that some common principle is at work in all and each of these several cases—that over and above all odd mischances, so many bankruptcies a little suggest an unfitness for the trade; that besides the ingenious reasons of ingenious gentlemen—there is some lurking quality, or want of a quality, in the national character of the French nation which renders them but poorly adapted for the form of freedom and constitution which they have so often, with such zeal and so vainly, attempted to establish.

In my last letter I suggested that this might be what I ventured to call a "want of stupidity." I will now try to describe what I mean in more accurate, though not, perhaps, more intelligible words.

I believe that I am but speaking what is agreed on by competent observers, when I say that the essence of the French character is a certain mobility; that is, as it has been defined, a certain "excessive sensibility to *present* impressions,"

which is sometimes "levity,"—for it issues in a postponement of seemingly fixed principles to a momentary temptation or a transient whim; sometimes "impatience"—as leading to an exaggerated sense of existing evils; often "excitement,"—a total absorption in existing emotion; oftener "inconsistency"—the sacrifice of old habits to present emergencies; and yet other unfavourable qualities. But it has also its favourable side. The same man who is drawn aside from old principles by small pleasures, who can't bear pain, who forgets his old friends when he ceases to see them, who is liable in time of excitement to be a one-idea-being, with no conception of anything but the one exciting object, yet who nevertheless is apt to have one idea to-day and quite another to-morrow (and this, and more than this, may I fancy be said of the ideal Frenchman) may and will have the subtlest perception of existing niceties, the finest susceptibility to social pleasure, the keenest tact in social politeness, the most consummate skilfulness in the details of action and administration,—may in short be the best companion, the neatest man of business, the lightest *homme de salon,* the acutest diplomat of the existing world.

It is curious to observe how this reflects itself in their literature. "I will believe," remarks Montaigne, "in anything rather than in any man's consistency." What observer of English habits—what person inwardly conscious of our dull and unsusceptible English nature would ever say so. Rather in our country obstinacy is the commonest of the vices, and perseverance the cheapest of the virtues. Again, when they attempt history, the principal peculiarity (a few exceptions being allowed for) is an utter incapacity to describe graphically a long-passed state of society. Take, for instance—assuredly no unfavourable example—M. Guizot. His books, I need not say, are nearly unrivalled for eloquence, for philosophy and knowledge; you read there, how in the middle age there were many "principles:" the principle of Legitimacy, the principle of Feudalism, the principle of Democracy; and you come to know how one grew, and another declined, and a third crept slowly on; and the mind is immensely edified, when perhaps at the 315th page a proper name occurs, and you mutter, "Dear me, why if there were not *people* in the time of Charlemagne! Who would have thought that?" But in return for this

utter incapacity to describe the people of past times, a Frenchman has the gift of perfectly describing the people of his own. No one knows so well—no one can tell so well—the facts of his own life. The French memoirs, the French letters are, and have been, the admiration of Europe. Is not now Jules Janin unrivalled at pageants and *prima donnas?*

It is the same in poetry. As a recent writer excellently remarks, "A French Dante, or Michael Angelo, or Cervantes, or Murillo, or Goethe, or Shakespeare, or Milton, we at once perceive to be a mere anomaly; a supposition which may indeed be proposed in terms, but which in reality is inconceivable and impossible." Yet in requital as it were of this great deficiency, they have a wonderful capacity for expressing and delineating the poetical and voluptuous element of everyday life. We know the biography of De Beranger. The young ladies whom he has admired—the wine that he has preferred—the fly that buzzed on the ceiling, and interrupted his delicious and dreaming solitude, are as well-known to us as the recollections of our own lives. As in their common furniture, so in their best poetry. The materials are nothing; reckon up what you have been reading, and it seems a *congeries* of stupid trifles; begin to read,—the skill of the workmanship is so consummate, the art so high and so latent, that while time flows silently on, our fancies are enchanted and our memories indelibly impressed. How often, asks Mr. Thackeray, have we read De Beranger—how often Milton? Certainly, since Horace, there has been no such manual of the philosophy of this world.

I will not say that the quality which I have been trying to delineate is exactly the same thing as "cleverness." But I do allege that it is sufficiently near it for the rough purposes of popular writing. For this *quickness* in taking in—so to speak—the present, gives a corresponding celerity of intellectual apprehension, an amazing readiness in catching new ideas and maintaining new theories, a versatility of mind which enters into and comprehends everything as it passes, a concentration in what occurs, so as to use it for every purpose of illustration, and consequently, (if it happen to be combined with the least fancy), quick repartee on the subject of the moment, and *bons-mots* also without stint and without end—and these qualities are rather like what we style cleverness. And what I call a proper stupidity keeps a man from all the defects of this

character; it chains the gifted possessor mainly to his old ideas; it takes him seven weeks to comprehend an atom of a new one; it keeps him from being led away by new theories—for there is nothing which bores him so much; it restrains him within his old pursuits, his well-known habits, his tried expedients, his verified conclusions, his traditional beliefs. He is not tempted to "levity," or "impatience," for he does not see the joke, and is thick-skinned to present evils. Inconsistency puts him out,—"What I says is this here, as I was a saying yesterday," is his notion of historical eloquence and habitual discretion. He is very slow indeed to be "excited,"—his passions, his feelings, and his affections are dull and tardy strong things, falling in a certain known direction, fixing on certain known objects, and for the most part acting in a moderate degree, and at a sluggish pace. You always know where to find his mind.

Now this is exactly what, in politics at least, you do not know about a Frenchman. I like—I have heard a good judge say—to hear a Frenchman talk. He strikes a light, but what light he will strike it is impossible to predict. I think he doesn't know himself. Now, I know you see at once how this would operate on a Parliamentary Government, but I give you a gentle illustration. All England knows Mr. Disraeli, the witty orator, the exceedingly clever *littérateur*, the versatile politician; and all England has made up its mind that the stupidest country gentleman would be a better Home Secretary than the accomplished descendant of the "Caucasian race." Now suppose, if you only can, a House of Commons all Disraelis, and do you imagine that Parliament would work? It would be what M. Proudhon said of some French assemblies, "a box of matches."

The same quality acts in another way, and produces to English ideas a most marvellous puzzle, both in their philosophical literature and their political discussion. I mean their passion for logical deduction. The habitual mode of argument is to get hold of some large principle or principles; to begin to deduce immediately; and to reason down from them to the most trivial details of common action. *Il faut être consequent avec soi-même*—is their fundamental maxim; and in a world, the essence of which is compromise, they could not well have a worse. I hold, metaphysically perhaps, that this is a consequence of that same impatience of disposition to which I have

before alluded. Nothing is such a bore as looking for your principles—nothing so pleasant as working them out. People who have thought, know that inquiring is suffering. A child a-stumbling timidly in the dark is not more different from the same child playing on a sunny lawn, than is the philosopher groping, hesitating, doubting and blundering about his primitive postulates, from the same philosopher proudly deducing and commenting on the certain consequences of his established convictions. On this account Mathematics have been called the paradise of the mind. In Euclid at least, you have your principles, and all that is required is acuteness in working them out. The long annals of science are one continued commentary on this text. Read in Bacon, the beginner of intellectual philosophy in England, and every page of the "Advancement of Learning" is but a continued warning against the tendency of the human mind to start at once to the last generalities from a few and imperfectly observed particulars. Read in the "Meditations" of Descartes, the beginner of intellectual philosophy in France, and in every page (once I read five) you will find nothing but the strictest, the best, the most lucid, the most logical deduction of all things actual and possible, from a few principles obtained without evidence, and retained in defiance of probability. Deduction is a game, and induction a grievance. Besides, clever impatient people want not only to learn, but to teach. And instruction expresses at least the alleged knowledge of possession. The obvious way is to shorten the painful the slow, the tedious, the wearisome process of preliminary inquiry—to assume something pretty—to establish its consequences—discuss their beauty—exemplify their importance—extenuate their absurdities. A little vanity helps all this. Life is short—art is long—truth lies deep—take some side—found your school—open your lecture-rooms—tuition is dignified—learning is low.

I do not know that I can exhibit the way these qualities of the French character operate on their opinions, better than by telling you how the Roman Catholic Church deals with them. I have rather attended to it since I came here; it gives sermons almost an interest, their being in French—and to those curious in intellectual matters it is worth observing. In other times, and even now in out-of-the-way Spain, I suppose it may be true that the Catholic Church was opposed to inquiry and

reasoning. But it is not so now, and here. Loudly—from the pens of a hundred writers—from the tongues of a thousand pulpits—in every note of thrilling scorn and exulting derision, she proclaims the contrary. Be she Christ's workman, or Anti-Christ's, she knows her work too well.—"Reason, Reason, Reason!"—exclaims she to the philosophers of this world—"Put in practice what you teach, if you would have others believe it; be consistent; do not prate to us of private judgment when you are but yourselves repeating what you heard in the nursery—ill-mumbled remnants of a Catholic tradition. No! exemplify what you command, inquire and make search—seek, though we warn you that ye will never find—yet do as ye will. Shut yourself up in a room—make your mind a blank—go down (as ye speak) into the 'depths of your consciousness'—scrutinize the mental structure—inquire for the elements of belief—spend years, your best years, in the occupation; and at length—when your eyes are dim, and your brain hot, and your hand unsteady—then reckon what you have gained: see if you cannot count on your fingers the certainties you have reached: reflect which of them you doubted yesterday, which you may disbelieve to-morrow; or rather, make haste—assume at random some essential *credenda*—write down your inevitable postulates—enumerate your necessary axioms—toil on, toil on—spin your spider's web—adore your own souls—or, if you prefer it, choose some German nostrum—try the intellectual intuition, or the 'pure reason,' or the 'intelligible' ideas, or the mesmeric *clairvoyance*—and when so or somehow you have attained your results, try them on mankind. Don't go out into the highways and hedges—it's unnecessary. Ring the bell—call in the servants—give them a course of lectures—cite Aristotle—review Descartes—panegyrize Plato—and see if the *bonne* will understand you. It is you that say '*Vox populi—Vox Dei*;' but you see the people reject you. Or suppose you succeed—what you call succeeding—your books are read; for three weeks, or even a season, you are the idol of the *salons*; your hard words are on the lips of women; then a change comes—a new actress appears at the Theatre Français or the Opéra—her charms eclipse your theories; or a great catastrophe occurs—political liberty (it is said) is annihilated—*il faut ne faire mouchard*, is the observation of scoffers. Any how, *you* are forgotten—fifty years may be the gestation of a philosophy,

not three its life—before long, before you go to your grave, your six disciples leave you for some newer master, or to set up for themselves. The poorest priest in the remote region of the *Basses Alpes* has more power over men's souls than human cultivation; his ill-mouthed masses move women's souls—can you? Ye scoff at Jupiter. Yet he at least was believed in—you never have; idol for idol, the *de*throned is better than the *un*throned. No, if you would reason—if you would teach—if you would speculate, come to us. We have our *premises* ready; years upon years before you were born, intellects whom the best of you delight to magnify, toiled to systematise the creed of ages; years upon years after you are dead, better heads than yours will find new matter there to define, to divide, to arrange. Consider the hundred volumes of Aquinas—which of you desire a higher life than that? To deduce, to subtilise, discriminate, systematise, and decide the highest truth, and to be believed. Yet such was his luck, his enjoyment. He was what you would be. No, no—*Credite, credite.* Ours is the life of speculation—the cloister is the home for the student. Philosophy is stationary—Catholicism progressive. You call—we are heard," &c., &c., &c. So speaks each preacher according to his ability. And when the dust and noise of present controversies have passed away, and in the silence of the night, some grave historian writes out the tale of half-forgotten times, let him not forget to observe that skilfully as the mediæval church subdued the superstitious cravings of a painful and barbarous age—in after years she dealt more discerningly still with the feverish excitement, the feeble vanities, and the dogmatic impatience of an over-intellectual generation.

And as in religion—so in politics: the same desire to teach rather than to learn—the same morbid appetite for exhaustive and original theories. It is as necessary for a public writer to have a system as it is for him to have a pen. His course is obvious; he assumes some grand principle—the principle of Legitimacy, or the principle of Equality, or the principle of Fraternity—and thence he reasons down without fear or favour to the details of every-day politics. Events are judged of, not by their relation to simple cause, but by their bearing on a remote axiom. Nor are these speculations mere exercises of philosophic ingenuity. Four months ago, hundreds of able writers were debating with the keenest ability and the most

ample array of generalities, whether the country should be governed by a Legitimate Monarchy, or an illegitimate; by a Social, or an old-fashioned Republic; by a two-chambered Constitution, or a one-chambered Constitution; on "Revision," or Non-revision; on the claims of Louis Napoleon, or the divine right of the national representation. Can any intellectual food be conceived more dangerous or more stimulating for an over-excitable population? It is the same in Parliament. The description of the Church of Corinth may stand for a description of the late Assembly: every one had a psalm, had a doctrine, had a tongue, had a revelation, had an interpretation. Each member of the Mountain had his scheme for the regeneration of mankind; each member of the vaunted majority had his scheme for newly consolidating the Government; Orleanist hated Legitimist, Legitimist Orleanist; moderate Republican detested undiluted Republican; scheme was set against scheme, and theory against theory. No two Conservatives would agree what to conserve; no Socialist could practically associate with any other. No deliberative assembly can exist with every member wishing to lead, and no one wishing to follow. Not the meanest Act of Parliament could be carried without more compromise than even the best French statesmen were willing to use on the most important and critical affairs of their country. Rigorous reasoning would not manage a parish-vestry, much less a great nation. In England, to carry half your own crochets, you must be always and everywhere willing to carry half another man's. Practical men must submit as well as rule; concede as well as assume. Popular government has many forms, a thousand good modes of procedure; but no one of those modes can be worked, no one of those forms will endure, unless by the continual application of sensible heads and pliable judgments to the systematic application of stiff axioms, rigid principles, and incarnated propositions. I am, &c., AMICUS.

P.S.—I was in hopes that I should have been able to tell you of the withdrawal of the decree relative to the property of the Orleans family. It was announced in the *Constitutionnel* of yesterday; but I regret to add was contradicted in the *Patrie* last evening. I need not observe to you that it is an act for which there is no defence, moral or political. It has immensely weakened the Government.

The change of Ministry is also a great misfortune to Louis Napoleon. M. de Morny, said to be a son of Queen Hortense (if you believe the people in the *salons*, the President is not the son of his father, and everybody else is the son of his mother), was a statesman of the class best exemplified in England by the late Lord Melbourne—an acute, witty, fashionable man, acquainted with Parisian persons and things, and a consummate judge of public opinion. M. Persigny was in exile with the President, is said to be much attached to him, to repeat his sentiments and exaggerate his prejudices. I need not point out which of the two is just now the sounder counsellor.

Letter V.

ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PRINCE-PRESIDENT.

My Dear Sir,—The many failures of the French in the attempt to establish a predominantly Parliamentary Government, have a strong family likeness. Speaking a little roughly, I shall be right in saying that the Constitutions of France have perished, both lately and formerly, either in a street-row or under the violence of a military power, aided and abetted by a diffused dread of impending street-rows, and a painful experience of the effects of past ones. Thus the Constitution of 1791 (the first of the old series) perished on the 10th of August, amid the exultation of the brewer Santerre. The last of the old series fell on the 18th Brumaire, under the hands of Napoleon, when the 5 per cents. were at 12, the whole country in disorder, and all ruinable persons ruined. The Monarchy of 1830 began in the riot of the three days, and ended in the riot of the 24th of February; the Republic of February perished but yesterday, mainly from terror that Paris might again see such days as the "days of June."

I think all sensible Englishmen who review this history (the history of more than sixty years) will not be slow to divine a conclusion peculiarly agreeable to our orderly national habits, viz., that the first want of the French is somebody or

something able and willing to keep down street-rows, to repress the frightful elements of revolution and disorder which, every now and then, astonish Europe; capable of maintaining, and desirous to maintain, the order and tranquillity which are (all agree) the essential and primary pre-requisites of industry and civilisation. If any one seriously and calmly doubts this, I am afraid nothing that I can further say will go far in convincing him. But let him read the account of any scene in any French revolution, old or new, or better let him come here and learn how people look back to the time I have mentioned (to June, 1848), when the Socialists,—not under speculative philosophers like Proudhon or Louis Blanc, but under practical rascals and energetic murderers, like Sobrier and Caussidiere,—made their last and final stand, and against them, on the other side, the National Guard (mostly solid shop-keepers, three-parts ruined by the events of February) fought (I will not say bravely or valiantly, but) furiously, frantically, savagely, as one reads in old books that half-starved burgesses in beleaguered towns have sometimes fought, for the food of their children; let any sceptic hear of the atrocities of the friends of order, and the atrocities of the advocates of disorder, and he will, I imagine, no longer be sceptical on two points,—he will hope that if he ever have to fight it will not be with a fanatic Socialist, nor against a demi-bankrupt fighting for "his shop;" and he will admit, that in a country subject to collisions between two such excited and excitable combatants, no earthly blessing is in any degree comparable to a power which will stave off, long delay, or permanently prevent the actual advent and ever-ready apprehension of such bloodshed. I therefore assume that the first condition of good Government in this country is a really strong, a reputedly strong, a continually strong Executive power.

Now, on the face of matters, it is certainly true that such a power is perfectly consistent with the most perfect, the most ideal type of Parliamentary Government. Rather I should say, such and so strong an Executive is a certain consequence on the existence of that ideal and rarely found type. If there is among the people, and among their representatives, a strong, a decided, an unflinching preference for particular ministers, or a particular course of policy, that course of policy

can be carried out, and will be carried out, as certainly as by the Czar Nicholas, whose Ministers can do exactly what they will. There was something very like this in the old days of King George III., of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Perceval. In those times, I have been told, the great Treasury official of the day, Mr. George Rose (still known to the readers of Sydney Smith) had a habit of observing, upon occasion of anything utterly devoid of decent defence, "Well, well, this *is* a little too bad; we must apply our *majority* to this difficulty." The effect is very plain; while Mr. George Rose and his betters respected certain prejudices and opinions, then all but universal in Parliament, they in all other matters might do precisely what they would; and in all out of the way matters, in anything that Sir John could not understand, on a point of cotton-spinning or dissent, be as absolute as the Emperor Napoleon. But the case is (as we know by experience of what passes under our daily observation) immensely altered, when there is no longer this strong, compact, irrefragable, "following;" no distinctly divided, definite faction, no regular opposition to be daily beaten, no regular official party to be always victorious—but, instead, a mere aggregate of "independent members," each thinking for himself, propounding, as the case may be, his own sense or his own nonsense—one, profound ideas applicable to all time; another, something meritorious from the Eton Latin grammar, and a mangled republication of the morning's newspaper; some exceedingly philosophical, others only crotchetty, but, what is my point, each acting on his own head, assuming not Mr. Pitt's infallibility, but his own. Again, divide a political into three parties, any two of which are greater than the third, and it will be always possible for an adroit and dexterous intriguer (M. Thiers has his type in most assemblies) to combine, three or four times a fortnight, the two opposition parties into a majority on some interesting question, on some matters of importance. The best government possible under the existing circumstances will be continually, and, in a hazardous state of society, even desperately and fatally weakened. We have had in our own feasible House of Commons—aye, and among the most stupid and sensible portion of it, the country gentlemen, within these few years, a striking example of how far party zeal, the heat of disputation, and a strong desire

for a deep revenge, will carry the best intentioned politicians in destroying the executive efficiency of an obnoxious Government. I mean the division of the House of Commons on the Irish Army Bill, which ended in the resignation of Sir R. Peel. You remember on that occasion the country party, under the guidance of Lord G. Bentinck, in the teeth of the Irish policy which they had been advocating and supporting all their lives, and which they would advocate and support again now, in the teeth of their previous votes, and (I am not exaggerating the history) almost of their avowed present convictions, defeated a Government, not on a question of speculative policy or recondite importance, but upon the precautionary measures necessary (according to every idea that a Tory esquire is capable of entertaining) for preventing a rebellion, the occurrence which they were told (and as the event proved, told truly) might be speedy, hourly, and immediate. Of course I am not giving any opinion of my own about the merits of the question. The Whigs may be right; it may be good to have shown the world how little terrible is the bluster of Irish agitation. But I cite the event as a striking example of an essential evil in a three-sided Parliamentary system, as practically showing that a generally well-meaning opposition will, in defiance of their own habitual principles, cripple an odious executive, even in a matter of street-rows and rebellions. I won't weary you with tediously pointing the moral. If such things are done in the green tree, what may be done in the dry? If party zeal and disputation excitement so hurry men away in our own grave, business-like experienced country—what may we expect from a vain, a volatile, an ever-changing race?

Nor am I drawing a French Assembly from mere history, or from my own imagination. In the late Chamber, the great subject of the very last *Annual Register*, there were not only three parties but four. There was a perpetually shifting element of 200 members, calling itself the Mountain, which had in its hands the real casting vote between the President's Government and the Constitutional opposition. In the very last days of the Constitution they voted against, and thereby negatived, the proposition of the questors for arming the Assembly; partly because they disliked General Changarnier, and detested General Cavaignac; partly because,

being extreme Socialists, they would not arm anybody who was likely to use his arms against their friends on the barricades. The same party was preparing to vote for the Bill on the Responsibility of the President, actually, and according to the design of its promoters, in the nature of a bill of indictment against him, because they feared his rigour and efficiency in repressing the anticipated convulsion. The question, the critical question, *Who* shall prevent a new revolution? was thus actually, and owing to the lamentable divisions of the friends of order, in the hands of the Parliamentary representatives, of the very men who wished to effect that revolution, to be determined, I may say, ultimately, and in the last resort by the party of disorder.

Nor on lesser questions was there any steady majority, any distinctive deciding faction, any administering phalanx, anybody regularly voting with anybody else, often enough, or in number enough, to make the legislative decision regular, consistent, or respectable. Their very debates were unseemly On anything not pleasing to them, the Mountain (as I said) a yellow and fanatical generation—had (I am told) an engaging knack of rising *en masse* and screaming until they were tired. It will be the same, I do not say in degree (for the Mountain would certainly lose several votes now, and the numbers of the late Chamber were unreasonably and injudiciously large), but, in a measure, you will be always subject to the same disorder. A fluctuating majority, and a minority, often a ruling minority, favourable to rebellion. The cause, as I believe, is to be sought in the peculiarities of the French character, on which I dwelt, prolixly, I fear, and *ad nauseam*, in my last two letters. If you have to deal with a *mobile*, a clever, a versatile, an intellectual, a dogmatic nation, inevitably, and by necessary consequence, you will have conflicting systems—every man speaking his own words, and always giving his own suffrage to what seems good in his own eyes—many holding to-day what they will regret to-morrow —a crowd of crotchetty theories and a heavy percentage of philosophical nonsense—a great opportunity for subtle stratagem and intriguing selfishness—a miserable division among the friends of tranquillity, and a great power thrown into the hands of those who, though often with the very best intentions, are practically, and in matter of fact, opposed

both to society and civilisation. And, moreover, beside minor inconveniences and lesser hardships, you will indisputably have periodically—say three or four times in fifty years—a great crisis; the public mind much excited, the people in the streets swaying to and fro with the breath of every breeze, the discontented *ouvriers* meeting in a hundred knots, discussing their real sufferings and their imagined grievances, with lean features and angry gesticulations; the Parliament, all the while in permanence, very ably and eloquently expounding the whole subject, one man proposing this scheme, and another that; the opposition expecting to oust the Ministers and ride in on the popular commotion; the Ministers fearing to take the odium of severe or adequate repressive measures, lest they should lose their salary, their places and their majority; finally, a great crash, a disgusted people, overwhelmed by revolutionary violence, or seeking a precarious, a pernicious, but after all a precious protection from the bayonets of military despotism. Louis Philippe met these dangers and difficulties in a thoroughly characteristic manner. He bought his majority. Being a practical and not over sentimental public functionary, he went into the market and purchased a sufficient number of constituencies and members. Of course the *convenances* were carefully preserved; grossness of any kind is too jarring for French susceptibility; the purchase money was not mere coin, (which indeed the buyers had not to offer,) but a more gentlemanly commodity—the patronage of the Government. The electoral colleges were extremely small, the number of public functionaries is enormous; so that a very respectable body of electors could always be expected to have like (since the County Courts) a four-year old barrister, an immense prejudice for the existing Government. One man hoped to be *Maire*, another wanted his son got into St. Cyr or the Polytechnic School, and this could be got, and was daily got (I am writing what is hardly denied) by voting for the Government candidate. In a word, a sufficient proportion of the returns of the electoral colleges resembled the returns from Harwich or Devonport, only that the Government was the only bidder; for there are not, I fancy, in any country but England, people able and willing to spend, election after election, great sums of money for procuring the honour of a seat in a representative assembly.

In fact, to copy the well-known phrase, just as in the time of Burke certain gentlemen had the expressive nickname of the King's friends, so these constituencies may aptly be called the King's constituencies. Of course, on the face of it, this system worked, as far as business went, excellently well. For eighteen years the tranquillity was maintained. France, it may be, has never enjoyed so much calm civilisation, so much private happiness; and yet, after all such and so long blessings, it fell in a mere riot—it fell unregretted. It is a system which no wise man can wish to see restored; it was a system of regulated corruption.

But it does not at all follow, nor I am sure will you be apt so to deduce, that because I imagine that France is unfit for a Government in which a House of Commons is, as with us, the sovereign power in the State, I therefore believe that it is fit for no freedom at all. Our own constitutional history is the completest answer to any such idea. For centuries, the House of Commons was habitually, we know, but a third-rate power in the State. First the Crown, then the House of Lords enjoyed the ordinary and supreme dominion; and down almost to our own times the Crown and House of Lords, taken together, were much more than a sufficient match for the people's house; but yet we do not cease to proclaim, daily and hourly, in season and out of season, that the English people never have been slaves. It may, therefore, well be that our own country having been free under a constitution in which the representative element was but third-rate in power and dignity, France and other nations may contrive to enjoy that advantage from institutions in which it is only second-rate.

Now, of this sort is the Constitution of Louis Napoleon. I am not going now, after prefacing so much to discuss its details; indeed, I do not feel competent to do so. What should we say to a Frenchman's notion of a £5 householder, or the 4th and 5th clauses of the New Reform Bill? and I quite admit that a paper building of this sort can hardly be safely criticised till it is carried out on *terra firma*, till we see not only the theoretic ground-plan, but the actual inhabited structure. The life of a constitution is in the spirit and disposition of those who work it; and we can't yet say in the least what that, in this case, will be; but so far as the con-

stitution shows its meaning on the face of it, it clearly belongs to the class which I have named. The *Corps Législatif* is not the administering body, it is not even what perhaps it might with advantage have been, a petitioning and remonstrating body; but it possesses the Legislative veto, and the power of stopping *en masse* the supplies. They are not a working, a ruling, or an initiative, or supremely decisive, but an immense checking power. They will be unable to change Ministers, or aggravate the course of revolutions; but they could arrest an unpopular war—they could reject an unpopular law. They are, at least in theory, a powerful and important drag-chain. Out of the mouths of its adversaries this system possesses what I have proved, or conjectured, or assumed to be the prime want of the French nation—a strong executive. The objection to it is that the objectors find nothing else in it. We confess there is no doubt now of a power adequate to repress street rows and revolutions.

At the same time, I guard myself against intimating any opinion on the particular minutiæ of this last effort of institutional invention. I do not know enough to form a judgment; I sedulously, at present, confine myself to this one remark, that the New Government of France belongs, in theory at least, to the right class of Constitutions—the class that is most exactly suited to French habits, French nature, French social advantages, French social dangers—the class I mean, in which the representative body has a consultative, a deliberative, a checking, and a minatory; not as with us a supreme, nearly an omnipotent, and exclusively initiatory function.

I am, yours, &c.

AMICUS.

P.S.—You may like five words on a French invasion. I can't myself imagine, and what is more to the point, I do not observe that anybody here has any notion of, any such inroad into England as was contemplated and proposed by General Changarnier. No one in the actual conduct of affairs, with actual responsibility for affairs, not, as the event proved, even Ledru Rollin could, according to me, encounter the risk and odium of such a hateful and horribly dangerous attempt. But, I regret to add, there is a contingency which sensible

people here (so far as I have had the means of judging) do not seem to regard as at all beyond the limits of rational probability, by which a war between England and France would most likely be superinducted; that is, a French invasion of Belgium. I do not mean to assure you that this week or next the Prince-President will make a razzia in Brussels. But I do mean that it is thought not improbable that somehow or other, on some wolf-and-the-lamb pretext, he may pick a quarrel with King Leopold, and endeavour to restore to the French the "natural limit" of the Rhine. Now, I have never seen the terms of the guarantee which the shrewd and cautious Leopold exacted from England before he would take the throne of Belgium; but as the only real risk was a French aggression upon this tempting territory, I do not make any doubt but that the expressions of that instrument bind us to go to war in defence of the country whose limits and independence we have guaranteed. And in this case an invasion of England would be as admissible a military movement as an invasion of France. I hope, therefore, you will use your best rhetoric to induce people to put our pleasant country in a state of adequate and tolerable defence.

I see by the invaluable *Galignani*, that some excellent people at Manchester are indulging in a little arithmetic. "Suppose" say they, "all the French got safe, and each took away 50*l.*, now how much do you fancy it would come to (40,000 men by 50*l.*, nought's nought is nought, nought and carry two)—while the *existing* burden of the National Debt!! Was there ever such amiable infatuation? It is not what the French could carry off, but what they would leave behind them, which is in the reasonable apprehension of reasonable persons. The funds at 50—broken banks—the *Gazette* telling you who had *not* failed—Downing-street *vide* Wales—destitute families, dishonoured daughters, one-legged fathers—the mourning shops utterly sacked—the customers in tears—a pale widow in a green bonnet—the Exchange in ruins—five notches on St. Paul's—and a big hole in the Bank of England;—these though but a few of the certain consequences of a French visit to London, are quite enough to terrify even an adamantine editor and a rather reckless correspondent.

Letter VI.

THE FRENCH NEWSPAPER PRESS.

Paris: Feb. 10.

My Dear Sir,—We learn from an Oriental narrative in considerable circulation, that the ancient Athenians were fond of news. Of course they were. It is in the nature of a mass of clever and intellectual people living together to want something to talk about. Old ideas—common ascertained truths—are good things enough to live by, but are very rare, and soon sufficiently discussed. Something else—true or false, rational or nonsensical—is quite essential; and, therefore, in the old literary world men gathered round the travelling sophist, to learn from him some thought, crotchet, or speculation. And what the vagabond speculators were once, that, pretty exactly, is the newspaper now. To it the people of this intellectual capital look for that daily mental bread, which is as essential to them as the less ethereal sustenance of ordinary mortals. With the spread of education this habit travels downward. Not the literary man only, but the *ouvrier* and the *bourgeois*, live and did live on the same food. This day's *Siècle* is discussed not only in gorgeous drawing-rooms, but in humble reading-rooms, and still humbler workshops. According to the printed notions of us journalists, this is a matter of pure rejoicing. The influence of the Press, if you believe writers and printers, is the one sufficient condition of social well-being. Yet there are many considerations which make very much against this idea: I can't go into several of them now, but those that I shall mention are suggested at once by matters before me. First, newspaper people are the only traders that thrive upon convulsion. In quiet times, who cares for the paper? In times of tumult, who does not? Commonly, the *Patrie* (the *Globe* of this country) sells, I think, for three sous: the evening of the *coup d'état*, itinerant ladies were crying under my window, "Demandez la *Patrie*—Journal du soir—treate sous—Journal du soir;" and I remember witnessing, even in our sober London, in February '48, how bald fathers of families paid large sums, and encountered bare-headed the unknown inclemencies of the night air, that they might learn the last

news of Louis Philippe, and, if possible, be in at the death of the revolutionary Parisians. "Happy," says the sage, "for the people whose annals are vacant;" but "woe! woe! woe!" he might add, "to the wretched journalists that have to compose and sell leading articles therein."

I am constrained to say that, even in England, this is not without its unfavourable influence on literary morals. Take in the *Times*, and you will see it assumed that every year ought to be an era. "The Government does nothing," is the indignant cry, and simple people in the country don't know that this is merely a civilised *facon de parler* for "I have nothing to say." Lord John must alter the suffrage, that we may have something pleasant in our columns.

I am afraid matters are worse here. The leading French journalist is, as you know, the celebrated Emile de Girardin, and, so far as I can learn anything about him, he is one of the most unprincipled politicians in existence. Since I have read the *Presse* regularly, it has veered from every point of the compass, well-nigh to every other—now for, now against, the revision of the Constitution,—now lauding Louis Napoleon to the skies,—now calling him plain M. Bonaparte, and insinuating that he had not two ideas, and was incapable of moral self-government,—now connected with the Red party, now praising the majority; but all and each of these veerings and shiftings determined by one most simple and certain principle—to keep up the popular excitement, to maintain the gifted M. de Girardin at the head of it.

Now a man who spends his life in stimulating excitement and convulsion is really an incendiary; and however innocent and laudable his brother exiles may be, the old editor and founder of the *Presse* is, as I believe, now only paying the legitimate penalty of systematic *arson*.

When a foreigner—at least an Englishman—begins to read the French papers, his first idea is "How well these fellows write! Why, every one of them has a style, and a good style too. Really, how clear, how acute, how clever, how perspicuous; I wish our journalists would learn to write like this;" but a little experience will modify this idea, at least I have found it so. I read for a considerable time in these witty periodicals with pleasure and admiration; after a little while I felt somehow that I took them up with an effort, but

I fancied, knowing my disposition, that this was laziness; when on a sudden, in the waste of *Galignani*, I came across an article of the *Morning Herald*. Now you'll laugh at me, if I tell you it was a real enjoyment. There was no toil, no sharp theory, no pointed expression, no fatiguing brilliancy, in fact, what the man in Lord Byron desired, "no nothing," but a dull, creeping, satisfactory sensation that now, at least, there was nothing to admire. As long walking in picture galleries makes you appreciate a mere wall, so I felt that I understood for the first time that really dulness had its interest. I found a pure refreshment in coming across what possibly might be latent sense, but was certainly superficial stupidity.

I think there is nothing we English hate like a clever but prolonged controversy. Now this is the life and soul of the Parisian press. Everybody writes against everybody. It is not mere sly hate or solemn invective, nothing like what we occasionally indulge in, about the misdemeanours of a morning contemporary. But they take the other side's article piece by piece, and comment on him, and, as they say in libel cases, *innuendo* him, and satisfactorily show that, according to his arithmetic, two and two make five—useful knowledge that. It is really good for us to know that some fellow (you never heard of him) it rather seems can't add up. But it interests people here—*c'est logique* they tell you, and if you are trustful enough to answer "*Mon Dieu, c'est ennuyeux, je n'en sais rien,*" they look as if you sneered at the Parthenon.

It is out of these controversies that M. de Girardin has attained his power and his fame. His articles (according to me at least) have no facts and no sense. He gives one all pure reasoning—little scrappy syllogisms; as some one said most unjustly of old Hazlitt, he "writes pimples." But let an unfortunate writer in the *Assemblée Nationale*, or anywhere else, make a little refreshing blunder in his logic, and next morning small punning sentences (one to each paragraph like an equation) come rattling down on him; it is clear as noonday that somebody said "something followed," and it does *not* follow, and it is so agreed in all the million *cabinets de lecture* after due gesticulation; and, moreover, that M. de Girardin is the man to expose it, and what clever fellows they are to appreciate him; but what the truth is who cares? The subject is forgotten.

Now all this, to my notion, does great harm. Nothing destroys common-place like the habit of arguing for arguing's sake; nothing is so bad for public matters as that they should be treated, not as the data for the careful formation of a sound judgment, but as a topic or background for displaying the shining qualities of public writers. It is no light thing that. M. de Girardin for many years has gained more power, more reputation, more money than any of his rivals; not because he shows more knowledge—he shows much less; not because he has a wiser judgment—he has no fixed judgment at all; but because he has a more pointed, sharp way of exposing blunders, intrinsically paltry, obvious to all educated men; and does not care enough for any subject to be diverted from this logical trifling by a serious desire to convince anybody of anything.

Don't think I wish to be hard on this accomplished gentleman. I am not going to require of hack-writers to write only on what they understand—if that were the law, what a life for the sub-editor; I should not be writing these letters, and how seldom and how timidly would the morning journals creep into the world. Nor do I expect, though I may still, in sentimental moods, desire, middle-aged journalists often buoyed up by chimerical visions of improving mankind.

You know what our eminent *chef* (by Thackeray profanely called Jupiter Jeames) has been heard to say over his gin and water, in an easy and voluptuous moment: "Enlightenment be——, I want the fat fool of a thick-headed reader to say, 'Just *my own* views,' else he ain't pleased, and may be he stops the paper." I am not going to require supernatural excellence from writers. Yet there are limits. If I were a chemist, I should not mind, I suppose, selling now and then, a deleterious drug on a due affidavit of rats, then and there filed before me; yet I don't feel as if I could live comfortably on the sale of mere arsenic. I fancy I should like to sell something wholesome occasionally. So, though one might, upon occasion, edge on a riot, or excite to a breach of the peace, I should not like to be every day feeding on revolutionary excitement. Nor should I like to be exclusively selling diminutive, acute, quibbling leaders (what they call in the Temple special demurrers), certain to occupy people with small fallacies, and lead away their minds from the great questions actually at issue.

Sometimes I might like to feel as if I understood what I wrote on, but of course with me this indulgence must be very rare. You know in France journalism is not only an occupation, it is a career. As in far-off Newcastle a coalfitter's son looks wistfully to the bar, in the notion that he too may emulate the fame and fortune of Lord Eldon or Lord Stowell, so in fair Provence, a pale young aspirant packs up his little bundle in the hope of rivalling the luck and fame of M. Thiers; he comes to Paris—he begins, like the great historian, by dining for thirty sous in the Palais Royal, in the hope that after long years of labour and jealousy he, too, may end by sleeping amid curtains of white muslin lined with pink damask. Just consider for a moment what a difference this one fact shows between France and England. Here a man who begins life by writing in the newspapers, has an appreciable chance of arriving to be Minister of Foreign Affairs. The class of public writers is the class from which the representative of Lord Aberdeen, Lord Palmerston, or Lord Granville will most likely be chosen. Well, well, under that *régime* you and I might have been important people; we might have handled a red box, we might have known what it was to have a reception, to dine with the Queen, to be respectfully mystified by the *corps diplomatique*. But angry Jove forbade—of course we can hardly deny that he was wrong, —and yet if the revolutions of '48 have clearly brought out any fact, it is the utter failure of newspaper statesmen. Everywhere they have been tried: everywhere they have shown great talents for intrigue, eloquence, and agitation,—how rarely have they shown even fair aptitude for ordinary administration; how frequently have they gained a disreputable renown by a laxity of principle, surpassing the laxity of their aristocratic and courtly adversaries. Such being my imperfect account of my imperfect notions of the French press, I can't altogether sympathise in the extreme despondency of many excellent persons at its temporary silence since the *coup d'état*. I might even rejoice at it, if I thought that the Parisian public could in any manner be broken of their dependence on the morning's article. But I have no such hope; the taste has got down too deep into the habits of the people; some new thing will still be necessary; and every government will find some of its most formidable difficulties in their taste for political disputation and controversial excitement. The ban must sooner or later be

taken off; the President sooner or later must submit to censure and ridicule, and whatever laws he may propose about the press, there is none which scores of ingenious men—now animated by the keenest hatred, will not try every hazard to evade. What he may do to avoid this is as yet unknown. One thing, however, I suppose is pretty sure, and I fancy quite wise. The press will be restrained from discussing the principles of the Government. Socialists will not be allowed to advocate a Democratic Republic. Legitimists will not be allowed to advocate the cause of Henri Cinq: nor Orleanists the cause of the Comte de Paris. Such indulgence might be tolerable in more temperate countries, but experience shows that it is not safe now and here.

A really sensible press, arguing temperately after a clear and satisfactory exposition of the facts, is a great blessing in any country. It would be still more a blessing in a country where, as I tried to explain formerly, the representative element must play (if the public security is to be maintained) a rather secondary part. It would then be a real stimulus to deliberate inquiry and rational judgment upon public affairs; to the formation of common-sense views upon the great outlines of public business; to the cultivation of sound moral opinions and convictions on the internal and international duties of the State. Even the actual press, which we may expect to see here, may not be pernicious. It will doubtless stimulate to many factious proceedings, and many interruptions of the public prosperity; it may very likely conduce to drive the President (contrary, if not to his inclination, at least to his personal interest) into foreign hostilities and international aggression; but it may be, notwithstanding, useful in preventing private tyranny, in exposing wanton oppression, in checking long-suffering revenge; it may prevent acts of spoliation like what they call here *le premier vol de l'aigle*—the seizure of the Orleans property;—in a word, being certain to oppose the executive, where the latter is unjust its enemy will be just.

I had hopes that this letter would be the last with which I should tease you; but I find I must ask you to be so kind as to find room for one, and only for one more.

I am, yours, &c.,

AMICUS.

Letter VII.

CONCLUDING LETTER.

Paris: Feb. 19, 1852.

Sir,—There is a story of some Swedish Abbè, in the last century, who wrote an elaborate work to prove the then constitution of his country to be immortal and indestructible. While he was correcting the proof sheets, a friend brought him word that—behold! the King had already destroyed the said polity. "Sir," replied the gratified author, "our Sovereign, the illustrious Gustavus, may certainly overthrow the Constitution, but never *my book*." I beg to parody this sensible remark; for I wish to observe to you, that even though Louis Napoleon turn out a bad and mischievous ruler, he won't in the least refute these letters.

What I mean is as follows. Above all things, I have designed to prove to you that the French are by character unfit for a solely and predominantly Parliamentary Government; that so many and so great elements of convulsion here exist, that it will be clearly necessary that a strong, vigorous, anti-barricade executive should, at whatever risk and cost, be established and maintained; that such an Assembly as the last is irreconcileable with this; in a word, that riots and revolutions must, if possible, come to an end, and only such a degree of liberty and democracy be granted to the French nation, as is consistent with the consolidated existence of the order and tranquillity which are equally essential to rational freedom and civilised society.

In order to combine the maintenance of order and tranquillity with the maximum of possible liberty, I hope that it may in the end be found possible to admit into a political system a representative and sufficiently democratic Assembly, without that Assembly assuming and arrogating to itself those nearly omnipotent powers, which in our country it properly and rightfully possesses, but which in the history of the last sixty years, we have, as it seems to me, so many and so cogent illustrations that a French Chamber is, by genius and constitution, radically incapable to hold and exercise. I hope that some checking, consultative, petitioning Assembly—some

Boule, in the real sense of the term,—some *Council*, some provision by which all grave and deliberate public opinion (I do not speak more definitely, for an elaborate constitution, from a foreigner, must be an absurdity) may organise and express itself—yet at the same time, without utterly hampering and directing—and directing amiss—those more simple elements of national polity on which we must, after all, rely for the prompt and steady repression of barricade-making and bloodshed.

I earnestly desire to believe that some such system as this may be found in practice possible; for otherwise, unless I quite misread history, and altogether mistake what is under my eyes, after many more calamities, many more changes, many more great Assemblies abounding in Verguiauds and Berryers, the essential deficiencies of debating Girondin statesmen will become manifest, the uncompact, unpractical, over volatile, over logical, indecisive, ineffectual rule of Gallican Parliaments will be unequivocally manifest (it is *now* plain, I imagine, but a truth so humiliating must be written large in letters of blood before those that run will read it), and no medium being held or conceived to be possible, the nation will sink back, not contented, but discontented, not trustfully but distrustfully, under the rule of a military despot; and if they yield to this, it will be from no faith, no loyalty, no credulity; it will be from a sense—a hated sense—of unqualified failure, a miserable scepticism in the probable success and the possible advantages of long-tried and ill-tried rebellion.

Now, whether the Constitution of Louis Napoleon is calculated to realise this ideal and intermediate system is, till we see it at work, doubtful and disputable. It is not the question so much of what it may be at this moment, as of what it may become in a brief period, when things have begun to assume a more normal state, and the public mind be relaxed from its present and painful tension. However, I should be deceiving you, if I did not inform you that the state of men's minds towards the Prince-President is not, so far as I can make it out, what it was the day after the *coup d'état*. The measures taken against the Socialists are felt to have been several degrees too severe, the list of exiles too numerous; the confiscation of the Orleans' property could not but be attended with the worst effect: the law announced by the Government organs respecting or

rather against the Press, is justly (though you know from my last letter I have no partiality for French newspapers) considered to be absurdly severe, and likely to countenance much tyranny and gross injustice; above all, instead of maintaining mere calm and order, the excessive rigour, and sometimes the injustice, of the President's measures, have produced a breathless pause (if I may so speak) in public opinion; political conversation is a whispered question, what will he do next? Firstly, the Government is dull, and the French want to be amused; secondly, it is going to spoil the journals (depreciate newspapers to a Frenchman, disparage nuts to a monkey); thirdly, it is producing (I do not say it has yet produced, but it has made a beginning in producing), a habit of apprehension; —in fact, I believe the French opinion of the Prince-President is near about that of the interesting damsel in George Sand's comedy, concerning her uninteresting *prétendu:* "*Vous l'aimez? n'est-ce pas?*" "*Oui, oui, oui, certainement je l'aime. Oui, oui, mille fois, oui, Je dis que oui. Je vous assure.* AU MOINS *je fais mon possible à l'aimer:*" the first attachment is not extinct, but people have begun—awful symptom—to add the withering and final saving clause. Yet it is, I imagine, a great mistake to suppose that the present constitution, if it work at all, will permanently work as a despotism, or that the *Corps Legislatif* will be without a measure of popular influence; the much more helpless *Tribunal* was not so in the much more troublesome times of the Consulate. And the source of such influence, and the manner of its operation may be, I imagine, well enough traced in the nature of the forces whereby Louis Napoleon holds his power.

A truly estimable writer says, I know, "that the Legislative body cannot have, by possibility, any analogy with the consultative and petitioning senate of the Plantagenets," nor can any one deny that the likeness is extremely faint (no illustration ever yet ran on all fours), the practical differences clear and convincing. But yet, according to the light which is given me now, I affirm that for one vital purpose,—the resisting and criticising any highly unpopular acts of a highly unpopular Government,—the *corps legislatif* of Louis Napoleon must, and will, inevitably possess a power compared with which the forty-day followers of the feudal *noblesse* seem as impotent as a congregation of Quakers; a force the peculiarity of which is

that you can't imprison, can't dissolve, can't annihilate it—I mean, of course, the moral power of civilised opinion. You may put down newspapers, dissolve Parliaments, imprison agitators, almost stop conversation, but you can't stop thought. You can't prevent the silent, slow, creeping, stealthy progress of hatred, and scorn, and shame. You can't attenuate easily the stern justice of a retarded retaliation. These influences affect the great reservoir of physical force—they act on the army. A body of men enlisted daily from the people, take to the barracks the notions of the people; in spite of new associations, the first impressions are apt to be retained; you overlay them but they remain. What is believed elsewhere and out of doors gives them weight. Each soldier has relations, friends, a family—he knows what they think. Much more with the officers. These are men moving in Parisian society, accessible to its influences, responsible to its opinion, apt to imbibe its sentiments. Certainly *esprit de corps*—the habit of obedience, the instinct of discipline, are strong, and will carry men far; but certainly, also, they have natural limits. Men won't stand being cut, being ridiculed, being detested, being despised, daily and for ever, and that for measures which their own understandings disapprove of. Remember there is not here any question of barbarous bands overawing a civilised and imperial city; no question of ugly Croats keeping down cultivated Italians; it is but a question of French gentlemen and French peasantry in uniform acting in opposition to other French gentlemen and other French peasants without uniform. Already there has been talk (I do not say well-founded, but still the matter was named) of breaking a couple or three hundred officers, for speaking against the Orleans decrees. Do you fancy that can be done every day? Do you imagine that a Parliament, whatever its nominal functions may be (remember those of the old *régime*), speaking the sense of the people about the question of the day, in a time of convulsion, and in a critical hour, would not be attended to, or at any rate thought of and considered, by an army taken from the people in a few years to return to the people,—commanded by men selected from and every day mixing with common society and very ordinary mankind. The 2nd of December showed how readily such troops will support a decided and popular President against an intriguing, divided, impotent Chamber. But such hard blows

won't bear repetition. Soldiers—French soldiers, I take it especially from their quickness and intelligence, are neither deaf nor blind. If there be truth in history or speculation, national forces can't long be used against the nation; they are unmerciful, and often cruel to feeble minorities; they are ready now for a terrible onslaught on mere Socialists, just as of old they turned out cheerfully for awful dragonnades on the ill-starred Protestants; but once let them know and feel that everybody is against them—that they are alone, that their acts are contemned and their persons despised,—and gradually, or all at once, discipline and habit surely fail, men murmur or desert, officers hesitate or disobey, one regiment is dismissed to the Cabyles, another relegated to rural solitudes; at last, most likely in the decisive moment of the whole history, the rulers, who relied only on their troops, are afraid to call them out; they hesitate, send spies and commissioners to inquire. "*Vive le Gouvernement Provisoire!*"—the black and roaring multitude rises and comes on; but two seconds, and the obnoxious institutions are lost in the flood; nothing is heard but the cry of the hour, sounding shrill and angry over the waste of Revolution—"*Vive le Diable!*" With such a force behind them, a French Parliament, of whatever nature, with whatever written duties, is, if at the head of the movement, in the critical hour, apt to be stronger than the strongest of the Barons.

Nor do I concur with those who censure the President for "recommending" avowedly the candidates he approves. It is a part of the great question, how is universal suffrage to be worked successfully in such a country as France? The peasant proprietors have but one political idea that they wish the Prince to govern them;—they wish to vote for the candidate most acceptable to him, and they wish nothing else. Why is he wrong in telling them which candidate that is?

Still, no doubt, the reins are now strained a great deal too tight. It is possible, quite possible, that a majority in this Parliament may be packed, but what I would impress on you is that it can't always be packed. Sooner or later constituencies who wish to oppose the Government will, in spite of *maires* and *prefets*, elect the opposition candidate: it is in the nature of any, even the least vigorous system of popular

election, to struggle forwards and progressively attain to some fair and reasonable correspondence with the substantial views and opinions of the constituent people.

I therefore fall back on what I told you before—my essential view or crotchet about the mental aptitudes and deficiencies of the French people. The French, said Napoleon, are *des machines nerveuses.*

The point is, can their excitable, volatile, superficial, over-logical, uncompromising character be managed and manipulated as to fit them for entering on a practically uncontrolled system of Parliamentary Government? Will not any large and omnipotent Assembly resemble the stormy Constituent and the late Chamber, rather than business-like, formal, ennui-diffusing Parliament to which in our free and dull country we are felicitously accustomed? Can one be so improved as to keep down a riot? I foresee a single and but a single objection. I fancy, indeed I know, that there is a school of political thinkers not yet in possession of any great influence, but, perhaps, a little on the way thereto, which has improved or invented a capital panacea, whereby all nations are, within very moderate limits of time, to be surely and certainly fitted for political freedom; and that no matter how formed—how seemingly stable—how long ago cast and constructed be the type of popular character to which the said remedy is sought to be applied. This panacea is the foundation or restoration of provincial municipalities. Now, I am myself prepared to go a considerable length with the school in question. I do myself think, that a due and regular consideration of the knotty points of paving and lighting, and the deciding in the last resort upon them, is a valuable discipline of national character. It exercises people's minds on points they know, in things of which there is a test. Very few people are good judges of a good constitution; but everybody's eyes are excellent judges of good light; every man's feet are profound in the theory of agreeable stones. Yet I can't altogether admit, nevertheless, that municipalities are the sufficient and sole, though they may be very likely an essential pre-requisite of political freedom. There is the great instance of Hindostan to the contrary. The whole old and national system of that remarkable country—a system in all probability as ancient as the era of Alexander, is a village system; and one so

curious, elaborate, I fancy I might say so profound, that the best European observers—Sir Thomas Munro, and that sort of people—are most strenuous for its being retained unimpaired. According to them the village hardly heard of the Imperial Government, except for the purpose of Imperial taxation. The business of life through that whole vast territory, has always been practically determined by potails and parish-vestries, and yet nevertheless and in spite of this capital and immemorial municipal system, our subjects, the Hindoos, are still slaves and still likely to be slaves; still essentially slavish, and likely, I much fear, very long indeed to remain so. It is therefore quite certain that rural and provincial institutions won't so alter and adapt all national characters, as to fit all nations for a Parliamentary Constitution; consequently, the *onus probandi* is on those who assert that it will so alter and mould the French. Again, I assure you that the French do think of paving and lighting; not enough, perhaps, but still they have begun. The country is, as you know, divided into departments, arrondissements, and communes; in each of these there is a council, variously elected, but, in all cases, popularly and from the district, which has the sole control over the expenditure of the particular locality for every special and local purpose, and which, if I am rightly informed, have, in theory at least, the sole initiative in every local improvement. The defect, I fancy, is that in the exercise of these, considerable bodies are hampered and controlled by the veto and supervision of the central authority. The rural councils discuss and decide what in their judgment should be then done and what money shall be so spent; the better sort of the agricultural population have much more voice in the latter, than have the corresponding class in England, in the determination and imposition of our own county rate;—but it is the central authority which decides whether such proposals and recommendations shall in fact be carried out. In a word, the provinces have to *ask leave* of the Parisian Ministry of the Interior. Now I admit this is an abuse. I should maintain that elderly gentlemen with bald heads and local influence, ought to feel that they, in the final resort, settle and determine all truly local matters. Human nature likes its own road, its own bridge, its own lapidary obstacles, its own deceptive luminosity. But I ask again, can you fancy

that these little luxuries, to whatever degree indulged in, alter and modify in any essential particular, the levity and volatility of the French character? How much light to how much logic? How many paving stones to how much mobility? I can't foresee any such change. And even if so, what in the meantime?

We are left then, I think, to deal with the French character pretty much as we find it. What stealthy, secret, unknown, excellent forces may, in the wisdom of Providence, be even now modifying this most curious intellectual fabric, neither you nor I can know or tell. Let us hope they may be many. But if we indulge, and from the immense records of revolutionary history, I think, if with due distrust, we may legitimately and even beneficially in system-building and speculation, we must take the *data* which we have, and not those which we desire or imagine. Louis Napoleon has proposed a system; English writers by the thousand (if I was in harness instead of holiday-making I should be most likely among them) proclaim his system an evil one. What then? Do you know what Father Newman says to the religious reformers, rather sharply, but still well, "make out first of all where you stand —draw up your creed—write down your catechism." So I answer to the English eloquence, "State first of all what you would have—draw up your novel system for the French Government—write down your political constitution." Don't criticise but produce; do not find fault but propose—and when you have proposed upon theory and have created upon paper, let us see whether the system be such a one as will work, in fact, and be accepted by a wilful nation in reality—otherwise your work is nought.

And mind, too, that the system to be sketched out must be fit to protect the hearths and homes of men. It is easy to compose polities if you do but neglect this one essential condition. Four years ago, Europe was in a ferment with the newest ideas, the best theories, the most elaborate, the most artistic constitutions. There was the labour, and toil, and trouble, of a million intellects, as good, taken on the whole, perhaps, as the world is likely to see,—of old statesmen, and literary gentlemen, and youthful enthusiasts, all over Europe, from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean, from the frontiers of Russia to the Atlantic Ocean. Well, what have we gained?

A Parliament in Sardinia! Surely this is a lesson against proposing politics which won't work, convening assemblies that can't legislate, constructing executives that aren't able to keep the peace, founding constitutions inaugurated with tears and eloquence, soon abandoned with tears and shame; beginning a course of fair auguries and liberal hopes, but from whose real dangers and actual sufferings a frightened and terrified people, in the end, flee for a temporary, or may be a permanent, refuge under a military and absolute ruler.

Mazzini sneers at the selfishness of shopkeepers—I am for the shopkeepers against him. There are people who think because they are Republican there shall be no more "cakes and ale." Aye, verily, but there will though; or else stiffish ginger will be hot in the mouth. Legislative Assemblies, leading articles, essay eloquence—such are good—very good,—useful—very useful. Yet they can be done without. We can want them. Not so with all things. The selling of figs, the cobbling of shoes, the manufacturing of nails,—these are the essence of life. And let whoso frameth a Constitution for his country think on these things.

I conclude, as I ought, with my best thanks for the insertion of these letters; otherwise I was so full of the subject that I might have committed what Disraeli calls "the extreme act of human fatuity," I might have published a pamphlet: from this your kindness has preserved me, and I am proportionably grateful.

I am, yours,

Amicus.

APPENDIX II

Cæsareanism as it now Exists

THAT the French Emperor should have spare leisure and unoccupied reflection sufficient to write a biography is astonishing, but if he wished to write a biography his choice of a subject is very natural. Julius Cæsar was the first who tried on an imperial scale the characteristic principles of the French Empire,—as the first Napoleon revived them, as the third Napoleon has consolidated them. The notion of a demagogue ruler, both of a fighting demagogue and a talking demagogue, was indeed familiar to the Greek Republics, but their size was small, and their history unemphatic. On the big page of universal history, Julius Cæsar is the first instance of a democratic despot. He overthrew an aristocracy—a corrupt and perhaps effete aristocracy it is true, but still an aristocracy —by the help of the people, of the unorganised people. He said to the numerical majority of Roman citizens, "I am your advocate and your leader: make me supreme, and I will govern for your good, and in your name." This is exactly the principle of the French Empire. No one will ever make an approach to understanding it who does not separate it altogether, and on principle, from the despotisms of feudal origin and legitimate pretensions. The old Monarchies claim the obedience of the people upon grounds of duty. They say they have consecrated claims to the loyalty of mankind. They appeal to conscience, and even to religion. But Louis Napoleon is a Benthamite despot. He is for the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." He says, "I am where I am, because I know better than any one else what is good for the French people, and they know that I know better." He is not the Lord's anointed; he is the people's agent.

We cannot here discuss what the effect of this system was in ancient times. These columns are not the best place for an historical dissertation; but we may set down very briefly

* From "The Economist," March 4, 1865.

the results of some close and recent observation of the system as it now exists, as it is at work in France. Part of its effects are well understood in England, but a part of them are, we think, but mistily seen and imperfectly apprehended.

In the first place, the French Empire is really the *best finished* democracy which the world has ever seen. What the many at the moment desire is embodied with a readiness, and efficiency, and a completeness which has no parallel, either in past history or present experience. An absolute Government with a popular instinct has the unimpeded command of a people renowned for orderly dexterity. A Frenchman will have arranged an administrative organisation really and effectually, while an Englishman is still bungling and a German still reflecting. An American is certainly as rapid, and, in some measure, as efficient, but his speed is a little headlong and his execution is very rough; he tumbles through much, but he only tumbles. A Frenchman will not hurry; he has a deliberate perfection in detail, which may always be relied on, for it is never delayed. The French Emperor knows well how to use these powers. His bureaucracy is not only endurable but pleasant. An idle man who wants his politics done for him, has them done for him. The welfare of the masses—the present good of the present multitude—is felt to be the object of the Government and the law of the polity. The Empire gives to the French the full gratification of their main wishes, and the almost artistic culture of an admirable workmanship, of an Administration finished as only Frenchmen can finish it, and as it never was finished before.

It belongs to such a Government to care much for material prosperity, and it does care. It makes the people as comfortable as they will permit. If they are not more comfortable, it is their own fault. The Government would give them free trade, and consequent diffused comfort if it could.

No former French Government has done as much for free trade as this Government. No Government has striven to promote railways, and roads, and industry, like this Government. France is much changed in twelve years. Not exactly by the mere merit of the Empire, for it entered into a great inheritance; it succeeded to the silent work of the free monarchy which revolution had destroyed and impeded. There were

fruitful and vigorous germs of improvement ready to be elicited—ready to start forth—but, under an unintelligent Government they would not have started forth; they would have lain idle and dead, but under the adroit culture of the present Government, they have grown so as to amaze Europe and France itself.

If, indeed, as is often laid down, the *present happiness* of the greatest number was the characteristic object of Government, it would be difficult to make out that any probable French Government would be better, or indeed nearly so good, as the present. The intelligence of the Emperor on economical subjects—on the bread and meat of the people—is really better than that of the classes opposed to him. He gives the present race of Frenchmen more that is good than any one else would give them, and he gives it them in their own name. They have as much as they like of all that is good for them. But if not the present happiness of the greatest number but *their future elevation*, be, as it is, the true aim and end of Government, an estimate of the Empire will be strangely altered. It is an admirable Government for present and coarse purposes, but a detestable Government for future and refined purposes.

In the first place, it stops the *teaching apparatus;* it stops the effectual inculcation of important thought upon the mass of mankind. All other mental effort but this the Empire not only permits but encourages. The high intellect of Paris is as active, as well represented, as that of London, and it is even more keen. Intellect still gives there, and has always given, a distinctive position. To be a *Membre de l'Institut* is a recognised place in France; but in London, it is an ambiguous distinction to be a "clever fellow." The higher kinds of thought are perhaps better discussed in Parisian society than in London society, and better argued in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* than in any English periodical. The speculative thought of France has not been killed by the Empire; it is as quick, as rigorous, as keen, as ever. But though still alive, it is no longer powerful; it cannot teach the mass. The *Revue* is permitted, but newspapers—effectual newspapers—are forbidden. A real course of free lectures on popular subjects would be impossible in Paris. *Agitation* is forbidden, and it is agitation, and agitation alone, which

teaches. The crude mass of men bear easily philosophical treatises, refined articles, elegant literature; there are but two instruments penetrative enough to reach their opaque minds—the newspaper article and the popular speech, and both of these are forbidden.

In London the reverse is true. We may say that only the loudest sort of expression is permitted to attain its due effect. The popular organs of literature so fill men's minds with incomplete thoughts, that deliberate treatment, that careful inquiry, that quiet thoughts have no hearing. People are so deafened with the loud reiteration of many half-truths, that they have neither curiosity nor energy for elaborate investigation. The very word "elaborate" is become a reproach: it produces something which the mass of men do not like because it is above them,—which is tiresome because it needs industry,—difficult because it wants attention,—complicated because it is true. On the whole, perhaps, English thought has rarely been so unfinished, so piecemeal, so *ragged* as it is now. We have so many little discussions that we get no full discussion; we eat so many sandwiches that we spoil our dinner. And on the Continent, accordingly, the speculative thought of England is despised. It is believed to be meagre, uncultivated, and immature. We have only a single compensation. Our thought may be poor and rough and fragmentary, but it is effectual. With our newspapers and our speeches—with our clamorous multitudes of indifferent tongues—we beat the ideas of the few into the minds of the many. The head of France is a better head than ours, but it does not move her limbs, the head of England is in comparison a coarse and crude thing, but rules her various frame and regulates her whole life.

France, *as it is*, may be happier because of the Empire, but France *in the future* will be more ignorant because of the Empire. The daily play of the higher mind upon the lower mind is arrested. The present Government has given an instalment of free trade, but it could not endure an agitation for free trade. A democratic despotism is like a theocracy; it assumes its own correctness. It says, "I am the representative of the people; I am here because I know what they wish, because I know what they should have." As Cavaignac once said, "A Government which permits its principles to be

questioned is a lost Government." All popular discussion whatever which aspires to *teach* the Government is radically at issue with the hypothesis of the Empire. It says that the Cæsar, the omniscient representative, is a mistaken representative, that he is not fit to be Cæsar.

The deterioration of the future is one inseparable defect of the imperial organisation, but it is not the only one,—for the moment, it is not the greatest. The greatest is the corruption of the present. A greater burden is imposed by it upon human nature than human nature will bear. Everything requires the support, aid, countenance of the Central Government, and yet that Government is expected to keep itself pure. Concessions of railways, concessions of the privilege of limited liability,—on a hundred subjects, legal permission, administrative help are necessary to money-making. You concentrate upon a small body of leading official men the power of making men's fortunes, and it is simple to believe they will not make their own fortunes. The very principle of the system is to concentrate power, and power is money. Sir Robert Walpole used to say, "No honest man could be a 'Minister;'" and in France the temptations would conquer all men's honesty. The system requires angels to work it, and perhaps it has not been so fortunate as to find angels. The nod of a Minister on the Bourse is a fortune, and somehow or other Ministers make fortunes. The Bourse of Paris is still so small that a leading capitalist may produce a great impression on it, and a leading capitalist working with a great Minister, a vast impression. Accordingly, all that goes with sudden wealth; all that follows from the misuse of the *two* temptations of civilisation, money and women, is concentrated round the Imperial court. The Emperor would cure much of it if he could, but what can he do? They say he has said "that he will not change his men. He will not substitute fleas that are hungry for fleas which at least are partially satisfied." He is right. The defect belongs to the system, to these men; an enormous concentration of power in an industrial system ensures an accumulation of pecuniary temptation.

These are the two main disadvantages which France suffers from her present Government; the greater part of the price which she has to pay for her present happiness. She endures the daily presence of an efficient immorality; she sacrifices

the educating apparatus which would elevate Frenchmen yet to be born. But these two disadvantages are not the only ones.

France gains the material present, but she does not gain the material future. All that gives present industry, her Government confers; in whatever needs confidence in future she is powerless. *Credit* in France, to an Englishman's eye, has almost to be created. The *country* deposits in the Bank of France are only 1,000,000*l.* sterling; that bank has fifty-nine branches, is immeasurably the greatest country bank in France. All discussions on the currency come back to the *cours forcé*, to the inevitable necessity of making inconvertible notes an irrefusable tender during a revolution. If you propose the simplest operations of credit to a French banker, he says, "You do not remember 1848; I do." And what is the answer? The present Government avowedly depends on, is ostentatiously concentrated, in the existing Cæsar. Its existence depends on the permanent occupation of the Tuileries by an extraordinary man. The democratic despot—the representative despot—must have the sagacity to divine the people's will, and the sagacity to execute it. What is the likelihood that these will be hereditary? Can they be expected in the next heirs, a child for Emperor, and a woman for Regent? The present happiness of France is happiness on a short life lease; it may end with the life of a man who is not young, who has not spared himself, who has always thought, who has always *lived*.

Such are the characteristics of the Empire as it is. Such is the nature of Cæsar's Government as we know it at the present. We scarcely expect even the singular ability of Napoleon III. will be able to modify, by an historical retrospect, the painful impressions left by actual contact with a living reality.

APPENDIX III

Memoir of the Right Hon. James Wilson*

PERHAPS some of the subscribers to the ECONOMIST would not be unwilling to read a brief memoir of Mr. Wilson, even if the events narrated were in no respect peculiar. They might possibly be interested in the biography of an author of whose writing they have read so many, even if the narrative related no marked transitions and no characteristic events. But there were in Mr. Wilson's life several striking changes. The scene shifts from the manufactory of a small Scotch hatter, in a small Scotch town, to London—to the Imperial Parliament, —to the English Treasury,—to the Council Board of India. Such a biography may be fairly expected to have some interest. The life perhaps of no *Political Economist* has been more eventful.

James Wilson was born at Hawick, in Roxburghshire, on June 3, 1805. His father, of whose memory he always spoke with marked respect, was a thriving man of business, extensively engaged in the woollen manufacture of that place. He was the fourth son in a family of fifteen children, of whom, however, only ten reached maturity. Of his mother, who died when he was very young, he scarcely retained any remembrance in after life. As to his early years little is now recollected, except that he was a very mild and serious boy, usually successful during school hours, but not usually successful in the play-ground.

As Mr. Wilson's father was an influential Quaker, he was sent when ten years old to a Quaker school at Ackworth, where he continued for four years. At that time—it may surprise some of those who knew him in later life to be told—he was so extremely fond of books as to wish to be a teacher; and as his father allowed his sons to choose their line in life, he was sent

*From "The Economist," November 17, 1860.

to a seminary at Earlscome in Essex, to qualify himself for that occupation. But the taste did not last long. As we might expect, the natural activity of his disposition soon induced him to regret his choice of a sedentary life. He wrote to Hawick, "I would rather be the most menial servant in my father's mill than be a teacher"; and he was permitted to return home at once.

Many years later he often narrated that, after leaving Earlscome, he had much wished to study for the Scottish bar, but the rules of the Society of Friends, as then understood, would not allow his father to consent to the plan. He was sometimes inclined half to regret that he had not been able to indulge this taste, and he was much pleased at being told by a great living advocate that "if he had gone to the bar he would have been very successful." But at the time there was no alternative, and at sixteen he accordingly commenced a life of business. He did not, however, lose at once his studious predilections. For some years at least he was in the habit of reading a good deal, very often till late in the night. It was indeed then that he acquired most of the knowledge of books which he ever possessed. In later life he was much too busy to be a regular reader, and he never acquired the habit of catching easily the contents of books or even of articles in the interstices of other occupations. Whatever he did, he did thoroughly. He would not read even an article in a newspaper if he could well help doing so; but if he read it at all, it was with as much slow, deliberate attention as if he were perusing a Treasury minute.

At the early age we have mentioned he commenced his business life by being apprenticed to a small hat manufacturer at Hawick; and it is still remembered that he showed remarkable care and diligence in mastering all the minutiæ of the trade. There was, indeed, nothing of the *amateur* man of business about him at any time. After a brief interval, his father purchased his master's business for him and for an elder brother, named William, and the two brothers in conjunction continued to carry it on at Hawick during two or three years with much energy. So small a town, however, as Hawick then was, afforded no scope for enterprise in this branch of manufacture, and they resolved to transfer themselves to London.

Accordingly, in 1824, Mr. Wilson commenced a mercantile life in London (the name of the firm being Wilson, Irwin, & Wilson), and was very prosperous and successful for many years. His pecuniary gains were considerable, and to the practical instruction which he then obtained he always ascribed his success as an economist and a financier. "Before I was twenty years of age," he said at Devonport in 1859, "I was a partner in a firm in London, and I can only say if there is in my life one event which I regard with satisfaction more than another, it is that I had then an opportunity of obtaining experience by observation which has contributed in the main to what little public utility I have since been to my country. During these few years I became acquainted—well acquainted—with the middle classes of this country. I also became acquainted in some degree with the working classes; and also, to a great extent, with the foreign commerce of this country in pretty nearly all parts of the world; and I can only say the information and the experience I thus derived have been to me in my political career of greater benefit than I can now describe."

In 1831, the firm of Wilson, Irwin, & Wilson was dissolved by mutual consent. But Mr. Wilson (under the firm of James Wilson & Co.) continued to carry on the same kind of business, and continued to obtain the same success. He began in 1824 with 2,000*l.*, the gift of his father, and in 1837 was worth nearly 25,000*l.*,—a fair result for so short a period, and evincing a steady business-like capacity and judgment; for it was the fruit not of sudden success in casual speculation, but of regular attention during several years to one business. From circumstances which we shall presently state, he was very anxious that this part of his career should be very clearly understood.

During these years Mr. Wilson led the usual life of a prosperous and intellectual man of business. He married,* and

*He was married on January 5, 1832, to Miss Elizabeth Preston, of Newcastle, and this has given rise to a statement that he was once in business at Newcastle. This is, however, an entire mistake. He was never in business anywhere except at Hawick and London. It may be added, that on the occasion of his marriage he voluntarily ceased to be a member of the Society of Friends, for whom he always, however, retained a high respect. During the rest of his life he was a member of the Church of England.

formed an establishment suitable to his means, first near his manufactory in London, and afterwards at Dulwich. He took great pleasure in such intellectual society as he could obtain; was specially fond of conversing on Political Economy, Politics, Statistics, and the other subjects with which he was subsequently so busily occupied.* Through life it was one of his remarkable peculiarities to be a *very animated* man, talking by preference and by habit on *inanimate* subjects. All the *verve*, vigour, and life which lively people put into exciting pursuits, he put into topics which are usually thought very dry. He discussed the Currency or the Corn Laws with a relish and energy which made them interesting to almost every one. "How pleasant it is," he used to say, "to talk a subject out," and he frequently suggested theories in the excitement of conversation upon his favourite topics which he had never thought of before, but to which he ever afterwards attached, as was natural, much importance. The instructiveness of his conversation was greatly increased as his mind progressed and his experience accumulated. But his genial liveliness and animated vigour were the same during his early years of business life, as they were afterwards when he filled important offices of state in England and in Calcutta. Few men can have led a more continuously prosperous and happy life than he did during those years. Unfortunately it was not to continue.

In 1836, or thereabouts, Mr. Wilson was unfortunately induced to commence a speculation in indigo, in conjunction with a gentleman in Scotland. It was expected that indigo would be scarce, and that the price would rise rapidly in consequence. Such would indeed appear to have been the case for a short period, since the first purchases in which Mr. Wilson took part yielded a profit. In consequence of this success, he was induced to try a larger venture,—indeed to embark most of his disposable capital. Unfortunately, the severe crisis of 1837 disturbed the usual course of all trades, and whether from that cause or from some other, indigo, instead of rising rapidly, fell rapidly. The effect on Mr. Wilson's position may be easily guessed. A very great

* Among his friends of this period should be especially mentioned Mr. G. R. Porter, of the Board of Trade, the author of "The Progress of the Nation," whose mind he described twenty years later as the most accurate he had ever known."

capitalist would have been able to hold, till better times but he was not. "On the first of January," he said at Devonport, "in a given year, my capital was nearer 25,000*l.* than 24,000*l.*, and it was all lost." Numerous stories were long circulated—most of them exaggerated, and the remainder wholly untrue, as to this period of misfortune in Mr. Wilson's life; but the truth is very simple. As is usual in such cases, various arrangements were proposed and agreed to, were afterwards abandoned, and others substituted for them. A large bundle of papers carefully preserved by him records with the utmost accuracy the whole of the history. The final result will be best described in his own words at Devonport, which precisely correspond with the balance sheets and other documents still in existence. They are part of a speech in answer to a calumnious rumour that had been circulated in the town :—

"Now, how did I act on this occasion? and this is what this placard has reference to. By my own means alone I was enabled at once to satisfy in full all claims against me individually, and to provide for the early payment of one-half of the whole of the demands against the firm, consisting of myself and three partners. I was further enabled, or the firm was enabled, at once to assign property of sufficient value, as was supposed, to the full satisfaction of the whole of the remainder of the liabilities. An absolute agreement was made, an absolute release was given to all the partners; there was neither a bankruptcy nor insolvency, neither was the business stopped for one day. The business was continued under the new firm, with which I remained a partner, and from which I ultimately retired in good circumstances. Some years afterwards it turned out that the foreign property which was assigned for the remaining half of the debts of the old firm, of which I was formerly a partner, proved insufficient to discharge them. The legal liability was, as you know, all gone; the arrangement had been accepted—an arrangement calculated and believed by all parties to be sufficient to satisfy all claims in full; but when the affairs of the whole concern were fully wound up, finding that the foreign property had not realised what was anticipated, I had it, I am glad to say, in my power to place at my banker's, having ascertained the amount, a sum of money to discharge all the remainder of that debt, which I considered morally, though not legally

due. This I did without any kind of solicitation—the thing was not named to me, and I am quite sure never were the gentlemen more taken by surprise than when a friend of mine waited on them privately in London, and presented each of them with a cheque for the balance due to them. Now, perhaps, I have myself to blame for this anonymous attack. I probably brought it on myself, for I always felt that if this matter were made public, it might look like an act of ostentatious obtrusion on my part, and therefore, when I put aside the sum of money necessary for the purpose, I made a request, in the letter I wrote to my bankers, desiring them as an especial favour that they would instruct their clerks to mention the matter to no one; and in order that it should be perfectly private, I employed a personal friend of my own in the city of London, in whose care I placed the whole of the cheques, to wait on those gentlemen and present each of them with a cheque, and I obtained from him a promise, and he from them, not to name the circumstance to any one." The secrecy thus enjoined was well preserved. Many of the most intimate friends of Mr. Wilson, and his family also, were entirely unacquainted with what he had done, and learnt it only through the accidental medium of an electioneering speech. It may be added, too, that some of those who knew the circumstances, and who have watched Mr. Wilson's subsequent career, believe that at no part of his life did he show greater business ability, self-command, and energy, than at the crisis of his mercantile misfortunes.

It is remarkable that the preface to Mr. Wilson's first pamphlet, on the "Influences of the Corn Laws," is dated the 1st March, 1839, the precise time at which he was negotiating with his creditors for a proper arrangement of his affairs; and to those who have had an opportunity of observing how completely pecuniary misfortune unnerves and unmans men—mercantile men, perhaps, more than any others—it will not seem unworthy of remark that a careful pamphlet, with elaborate figures, instinct in every line with vigour and energy, should emanate from a man struggling with extreme pecuniary calamity, and daily harrassed with the painful details of it.

After 1839 Mr. Wilson continued in business for several years, and with very fair success, considering that his capital was much diminished, and that the hat manufacture was

from temporary circumstances in a state of transition. He finally retired in 1844, and invested most of his capital in the foundation and extension of this journal.

These facts prove, as we believe, the conclusion which he was very desirous to make clear—that, though unfortunate on a particular occasion, Mr. Wilson was by no means, as a rule, unsuccessful in business. He did not at all like to have it said that he was fit to lay down the rules and the theory of business, but not fit to transact business itself. And the whole of his life, on the contrary, proves that he possessed an unusual capacity for affairs—an extraordinary *transacting* ability.

It may, however, be admitted that Mr. Wilson was in several respects by no means an unlikely man to meet with, especially in early life, occasional misfortune. To the last hour of his life he was always sanguine. He naturally looked at everything in a bright and cheerful aspect; his tendency was always to form a somewhat too favourable judgment both of things and men. One proof of this may be sufficient; he was five years Secretary of the Treasury, and he did not leave it a suspicious man.

Moreover, Mr. Wilson's temperament was very active and his mind was very fertile. And though in many parts of business these gifts are very advantageous, in many also they are very dangerous, if not absolutely disadvantageous. Frequently they are temptations. Capital is always limited; often it is *very* limited; and therefore a man of business, who is managing his own capital, has only defined resources, and can engage only in a certain number of undertakings. But a person of active temperament and fertile mind will soon chafe at that restriction. His inventiveness will show him many ways in which money might easily be made, and he cannot but feel that with his energies he would like to make it. If he have besides a sanguine temperament, he will believe that he can make it. The records of unfortunate commerce abound in instances of men who have been unsuccessful because they had great mind, great energy, and great hope, but had not money in proportion. Some part of this description was, perhaps, applicable to Mr. Wilson in 1839, but exactly how much cannot, after the lapse of so many years, be now known with any accuracy.

Mr. Wilson's position in middle life was by no means unsuitable to a writer on the subjects in which he afterwards attained eminence. He had acquired a great knowledge of business through a long course of industrious years; he had proved by habitual success in business that his habitual judgment on it was sound and good. If he had been a man of only ordinary energy and only ordinary ability, he would probably have continued to grow regularly richer and richer. But, by a single error natural to a very sanguine temperament and a very active mind, he had destroyed a great part of the results of his industry. He had a new career to seek. He was willing to expend on it the whole of his great energies. He was ready to take all the pains which were necessary to fit himself for success. When he wrote his first pamphlet he used to say that he thought "the sentences never would come right." In later life he considered three leading articles in the ECONOMIST, full of facts and figures, an easy morning's work, which was quite compatible with the transaction of much other business. Mr. Wilson was a finished man of business obliged by necessity to become a writer on business. Perhaps no previous education and no temporary circumstances could be conceived more likely to train a great financial writer and to stimulate his powers.

In 1839, Mr. Wilson published his "Influences of the Corn Laws"; in 1840, the "Fluctuations of Currency, Commerce, and Manufactures"; in 1840, "The Revenue; or, What should the Chancellor do?" in September, 1843, he established the ECONOMIST. The origin of the latter may be interesting to our readers. Mr. Wilson proposed to the editor of the *Examiner* that he should furnish gratuitously a certain amount of writing to that journal on economical and financial subjects; but the offer was declined, though with some regret, on account of the expense of type and paper. A special paper was therefore established, which proved in the end as important as the *Examiner* itself. From the first, Mr. Wilson was the sole proprietor of the ECONOMIST, and though he obtained pecuniary assistance—especially from the kindness of Lord Radnor—he embarked some capital of his own in it from the first, and afterwards repaid all loans made to him for the purpose of establishing it.

It would not be suitable to the design of this memoir to

give any criticism of Mr. Wilson's pamphlets, still less would it become the ECONOMIST to pronounce in any manner a judgment on itself. Nevertheless, it is a part of the melancholy duty we have undertaken to give some account of Mr. Wilson's characteristic position as a writer on Political Economy, and of the somewhat peculiar mode in which he dealt with that subject.

Mr. Wilson dealt with Political Economy like a practical man. Persons more familiar with the literature of the science might very easily be found. Mr. Wilson's faculty of reading was small, nor had he any taste for the more refined abstractions in which the more specially scientific Political Economists had involved themselves. "Political Economy," said Sydney Smith, "is become in the hands of Malthus and Ricardo, a school of metaphysics. All seem to agree what is to be done; the contention is how the subject is to be divided and defined. *Meddle with no such matters.*" We are far from alleging that this saying is just; nor would Mr. Wilson have by any means assented to it. But though he would have disavowed it in theory, it nevertheless embodies his instinctive feeling and characteristic practice. He "meddled with no such matters"; though he did not deny the utility of theoretical refinements, he habitually and steadily avoided them.

Mr. Wilson's predominating power was what may be called a business-imagination. He had a great power of conceiving transactions. Political Economy was to him the science of buying and selling, and of the ordinary bargains of men he had a very steady and distinct conception. In explaining such subjects he did not begin, as Political Economists have been wittily said to do, with "Suppose a man upon an island," but "What they *do* in the city is this." "The real course of business is so and so." Most men of business will think this characteristic a great merit, and even a theoretical economist should not consider it a defect. The *practical* value of the science of Political Economy (the observation is an old one as to *all* sciences) lies in its "middle principles." The extreme abstractions from which such intermediate maxims are scientifically deduced lie at some distance from ordinary experience, and are not easily made intelligible to most persons, and when they *are* made intelligible, most persons

do not know how to use them. But the intermediate maxims themselves are not so difficult; they are easily comprehended and easily used. They have in them a practical life, and come home at once to the "business" and the "bosoms" of men. It was in these that Mr. Wilson excelled. His "business-imagination" enabled him to see "what men did," and "why they did it;" "why they ought to do it," and "why they ought not to do it." His very clear insight into the real nature of mercantile transactions made him a great and almost an instinctive master of *statistical selection*. He could not help picking out of a mass of figures those which would tell most. He saw which were really material; he put them prominently and plainly forward, and he left the rest alone. Even now if a student of Parliamentary papers should alight on a return "moved for by Mr. Wilson," he will do well to give to it a more than ordinary attention, for it will be sure to contain something attainable, intelligible, and distinct.

Mr. Wilson's habit of always beginning with the facts, always arguing from the facts, and always ending with a result applicable to the facts, obtained for his writings an influence and a currency more extensive than would have been anticipated for any writings on Political Economy. It is not for the ECONOMIST to speak of the ECONOMIST; but we may observe that through the pages of this journal certain doctrines, whether true or false, have been diffused, far more widely than they ever were in England before,—far more widely than from their somewhat abstract nature we could expect them to be diffused,—far more widely than they are diffused in any other country than this. The business-like method and vigorous simplicity of Mr. Wilson's arguments converted very many ordinary men of business, who would have distrusted any theoretical and abstruse disquisition, and would not have appreciated any elaborate refinements. Nor was this special influence confined to mercantile men. It penetrated where it could not be expected to penetrate. The Duke of Wellington was, perhaps, more likely to be prejudiced against a theoretical Political Economist than any eminent man of his day; he belonged to the "prescientific period"; he had much of the impatient practicality incident to military insight; he was not likely to be very partial

to the " doctrines of Mr. Huskisson "—nevertheless, the Duke early pointed out Mr. Wilson's writings to Lord Brougham as possessing especial practical value; and when the Duke at a much later period was disposed to object to the repeal of the Navigation Laws, Mr. Wilson had a special interview to convince him of its expediency.

Nor is this faculty of exposition by any means a trifling power. On many subjects it is a common saying " that he only discovers who proves " ; but in practical politics we may almost say that he only discovers who convinces. It is of no use to have practical truths received by extraordinary men, unless they are also accepted by ordinary men. Whether Mr. Wilson was exactly a great writer we will not discuss: but he was a great *belief producer*; he had upon his own subjects a singular gift of *efficient* argument;—a peculiar power of bringing home his opinions by convincing reasonings to convincible persons.

The time at which Mr. Wilson commenced his career as an economical writer was a singularly happy one. An economical century has elapsed since 1839. The Corn Laws were then in full force, and seemed likely to continue so; the agriculturists believed in them, and other classes acquiesced in them; the tentative reforms of Mr. Huskisson were half forgotten; our tariff perhaps contained some specimen of every defect—it certainly contained many specimens of most defects; duties abounded which cramped trade, which contributed nothing to the exchequer, which were maintained that a minority might believe they profited at the expense of the majority ; all the now settled principles of commercial policy were unsettled; the " currency " was under discussion; the Bank of England had been reduced to accept a loan from the Bank of France; capitalists were disheartened and operatives disaffected; the industrial energies, which have since multiplied our foreign commerce, were then effectually impeded by legislative fetters and financial restraints. On almost all of these restraints Mr. Wilson had much to say.

Upon the Corn Laws, Mr. Wilson developed a theory which was rare when he first stated it, but which was generally adopted afterwards, and which subsequent experience has confirmed. He was fond of narrating an anecdote which shows

his exact position in 1839. There had just been a meeting of the Anti-Corn Law League at Manchester, and some speakers had maintained, with more or less vehemence, that the coming struggle was to be one of class against class, inasmuch as the Corn Laws were beneficial to the agriculturists, though they were injurious to manufacturers. The tendency of the argument was to set one part of the nation against another part. Mr. Wilson was travelling in the North, and was writing in a railway carriage part of the "Influences of the Corn Laws." By chance a distinguished member of the League, whom Mr. Wilson did not know, happened to travel with him, and asked him what he was about. "I am writing on the Corn Laws," said Mr. Wilson, "something in answer to the rubbish they have been talking at Manchester." "You are a bold man," was the reply; "Protection is a difficult doctrine to support by argument." But it soon appeared that Mr. Wilson was the better Free trader of the two. He held that the Corn Laws were injurious to all classes; that the agriculturists suffered from them as much as the manufacturers; that, in consequence, it was "rubbish" to raise a class enmity on the subject, for the interest of all classes was the same. "We cannot too much lament," he says in his "Influences of the Corn Laws," "and deprecate the spirit of violence and exaggeration with which this subject has always been approached by each party, which no doubt has been the chief cause why so little of real truth or benefit has resulted from the efforts of either; the arguments on either side have been supported by such absurd and magnified statements of the influences of those prohibitory laws on their separate interests, as only to furnish each other with a good handle to turn the whole argument into ridicule. It therefore appears to be necessary to a just settlement of this great question, that these two parties should be first reconciled to a correct view of the real influences thus exerted over their interests, and the interests of the country at large; to a conviction that the imaginary fears of change on the one hand, and the exaggerated advantages expected on the other hand, are equally without foundation; that there are in reality no differences in the solid interests of either party; and that *individuals*, *communities*, or *countries* can only be prosperous in proportion to the prosperity of the whole." And he proposed to

prove "that the agricultural interest has derived no benefit, but great injury, from the existing laws; and that the fears and apprehensions entertained of the ruinous consequences which would result to this interest by the adoption of a free and liberal policy with respect to the trade in corn are without any foundation; that the value of this property, instead of being depreciated, on the aggregate, would be rather enhanced, and the general interests of the owners most decidedly enhanced thereby;" and, "that, while incalculable benefit would arise to the manufacturing interest and the working population generally, in common with all classes of the community, from the adoption of such policy, nothing can be more erroneous than the belief that the price of provisions or labour would on the average be thereby cheapened, but that, on the contrary, the tendency would rather be to produce, by a state of generally increased prosperity, a higher average rate of each."

Whatever might be thought in 1839, in 1860 we can on one point have no doubt whatever. The repeal of the Corn Laws has been followed by the exact effect which Mr. Wilson anticipated. Whether his argument was right or wrong, the result has corresponded with his anticipation. The agriculturists have prospered more,—the manufacturers, the merchants, the operatives, all classes in a word have prospered more, since the Corn Laws were repealed, than they ever did before. As to abstract questions of politics there will always be many controversies; but upon a patent contemporaneous fact of this magnitude there cannot be a controversy.

It is indisputable also that, for the purposes of the Anti-Corn Law agitation, Mr. Wilson's view was exceedingly opportune. Mr. Cobden said not long ago (we quote the substance correctly even if the words are wrong), "I never made any progress with the Corn Law question while it was stated as a question of class against class." And a careful inquirer will find that such is the real moral of the whole struggle. If it had continued to be considered solely or mainly as a manufacturer's question, it might not have been settled to this hour. In support of this opinion Mr. Wilson made many speeches at the meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League, though he had little taste for the task of agitation.

We cannot give even an analysis of Mr. Wilson's arguments—

our space is too brief—but we will enumerate one or two of the principal points.

He maintained that, under our protective laws, the agriculturists never had the benefit of a high price, and always suffered the evil of a low price. When our crop was scanty, it was necessary to sell the small quantity at a high price, or the farmer could not be remunerated. But exactly at that moment foreign corn was permitted by law to be imported. In consequence, during bad years the farmer was exposed to difficulty and disaster, which were greater because, in expectation of an English demand, large stocks were often hoarded on the Continent, and at once poured in to prevent the home-grower compensating himself for a bad harvest by an equivalent rise of price.

Nor was the farmer better off in very plentiful years. There was a surplus in this country, and that surplus could not be exported, for the price of wheat was always lower abroad than here. The effect is evident. As corn is an article of the first necessity, a certain quantity of it will always be consumed, but more than that quantity will not be readily consumed. A slight surplus is, therefore, invariably found to lower the price of such articles excessively. In very good years the farmer had to sell his crop at an unremuneratingly low price, while in very bad years he was prevented from obtaining the high price which alone could compensate him for his outlay. Between the effects of the two sorts of years his condition was deplorable, and Parliamentary committees were constantly appointed to investigate it.

Mr. Wilson also explained how much these fluctuations in price contracted the home demand for agricultural produce. The manufacturing districts were, he showed, subjected by the Corn Laws to alternate periods of great excitement and great depression. When corn was very cheap, the mass of the community had much to spend on other things; when corn was very dear, they had very little to spend on those things. In consequence, the producers of "other things" were sometimes stimulated by a great demand, and at other times deadened by utter slackness. The labouring classes in the manufacturing districts acquired in periods of plenty a certain taste for what to them were luxuries, and in periods of scarcity were naturally soured at being deprived of them.

The manufacturers were frequently induced to invest additional capital by sudden augmentations of demand, and were often ruined by its sudden cessation. It was therefore impossible that the manufacturing classes could be steady customers of the agriculturists, for their own condition was fluctuating and unsteady.

Mr. Wilson also showed that if the landed interest was injured by the effects of the Corn Laws, this was of itself enough to injure the manufacturing interests. "The connection," he wrote, "between the manufacturer and the landed interest in this country is much closer than is generally admitted or believed; not only is the manufacturer dependent on the landed interest for the large portion of his goods which they immediately consume, but also for a very large portion of what he exports to the most distant countries. All commerce is, either directly or indirectly, a simple exchange of the surplus products of one country for those of another. It is therefore a first essential that we should be able to take the cotton of America, the sugar and coffee of India, the silk and teas of China, before they can take our manufactures; and if this be necessary, then must it follow that in proportion to the extent to which we can take their produce, will they be enabled to take our manufactures. Therefore, whatever portion of these products is consumed in this country by the landed interest, must to that extent enable the manufacturer to export his goods in return; and thus any causes which increase this ability on the part of the landed interest to consume, must give a corresponding additional ability to the manufacturers to export. Every pound of coffee or sugar, every ounce of tea, every article of luxury, the produce of foreign climes, whether consumed within the castles and halls of our wealthiest landowners, or in the humble cottages of our lowliest peasantry, alike represent some portion of the exports of this country. On the other hand, the dependence of the landowner is no less twofold on the manufacturer and merchant. He is not only dependent upon them for their own immediate consumption, but also for the consumption of whatever food enters into the cost price of their goods. Although the English farmer does not export his *corn* or his other produce in the exact shape and form in which he produces them, they constitute not the less on that account a distinct portion of the

exports of this country, and that in the best of all possible forms. Just as much as the manufacturer exports the wool or the silk which enters into the fabrics of those materials, does he export the corn which paid for the labour of spinning and weaving them. It would be an utter impossibility that this country could consume its agricultural produce but for our extensive manufacturing population; or that the value of what would be consumed could be near its present rate. If without this aid our agricultural produce were as great as it now is, a large portion would have to seek a market in distant countries; it would then have to be exported in the exact form in which it is produced; the expenses of which being so large would reduce very greatly from its value and net price, and the landed interest would be immediately affected thereby. But, as it is, the produce of the land is exported in the condensed form of manufactured goods, at a comparatively trifling expense, which secures a high value to it here. Thus, for example, a few bales of silk or woollen goods may contain as much wheat in their value as would freight a whole ship. To this advantage the landed interest is indebted, exclusively, for the very superior value of property and produce in this country to any other; because, by our great manufacturing superiority, a market is found for our produce over the whole world, conveyed in the cheapest and most condensed form. While the Chinese, or Indians, buy our cottons, our silks, or our woollens, they buy a portion of the grain and other produce of the land of this country; and therefore the producer here, while indulging in the delicacies or luxuries of Oriental climes, may only be consuming a portion of the golden heads of wheat which had gracefully waved in his own fields at a former day. Is it not, therefore, sufficiently clear that no circumstance whatever can either improve or injure one of these interests without immediately in the same way affecting the other? The connection is so close that it is impossible to separate or distinguish them. Any circumstance which limits our commerce must limit our market for agricultural produce; and any possible circumstance which deteriorates the condition of our agriculturists must deteriorate our commerce, by limiting our imports, and consequently our exports. These are general principles, and are capable of extension to the whole world, in all places,

and at all times; and the same principle as is thus shown to connect and combine the different interests of any one country, just as certainly operates in producing a similar effect between different countries; and we ardently hope, ere long, to find not only the petty jealousies between different portions of the same community entirely removed, but that all countries will learn that a free and unrestricted co-operation with each other in matters of commerce can only tend to the general benefit and welfare of all."

We do not say that these propositions were exactly discoveries of Mr. Wilson. During the exciting discussion of a great public question, the most important truths which relate to it are "in the air" of the age; many persons see them, or half see them; and it is impossible to trace the precise parentage of any of them. But we do say that these opinions were exactly suited to the broad and practical understanding of Mr. Wilson; that they were very effectively illustrated by him—more effectively probably than by any other writer; that he thought them out for himself with but little knowledge of previous theories; that they, principally, raised Free Trade from a class question to a national question; that to them, whether advocated by Mr. Wilson or by others, the success of the Anti-Corn Law agitation was in a great measure owing; that whatever doubt may formerly have been felt, an ample trial has now proved them to be true.

Mr. Wilson's pamphlet entitled "The Revenue; or, What should the Chancellor do?" which attracted considerable attention when it was published in 1841, is worth reading now, though dated so many years ago, for it contains an outline of the financial policy which Sir Robert Peel commenced, and which Mr. Gladstone has now almost completed. This pamphlet, which is rather long (27 moderate pages), was begun as an article for the *Morning Chronicle*, but proved too long for that purpose. It was written with almost inconceivable rapidity—nearly all, we believe, in a single night—though its principles and its many figures will bear a critical scrutiny even now.

In the briefest memoir of Mr. Wilson it is necessary to say something of the Currency; but it will not be advisable to say very much. If however we could rely on the patience of our readers, we should say a good deal. On no subject

perhaps did Mr. Wilson take up a more characteristic position. He saw certain broad principles distinctly and steadily, and to these he firmly adhered, no matter what refined theories were suggested, or what the opinion of others might be.

Mr. Wilson was a stern bullionist. He held that a five-pound note was a promise to pay five pounds. He answered Sir R. Peel's question, "What is a pound?" with Sir Robert's own answer. He said it was a certain specified quantity of gold metal. He held that all devices for aiding industry by issuing inconvertible notes were certainly foolish, and might perhaps be mischievous. He held that industry could only be really aided by additional *capital*—by new machines, new instruments, new raw material; that an addition to a paper *currency* was as useless to aid deficient capital, as it was to feed a hungry population.

Mr. Wilson held, secondly, that the *sine qua non*, the great prerequisite to a good paper currency, was the maintenance of an adequate reserve by the issuer. He believed that a banker should look at his liabilities as a whole—the notes which he has in circulation and the deposits he has in his ledger taken together; and should retain a sufficient portion of them (say one-third) in cash, or in something equivalent to cash, in daily readiness to pay them at once. Mr. Wilson considered that bankers might be trusted to keep such a reserve, as they would be ruined, sooner or later, if they did not; and if the notes issued by them were always convertible at the pleasure of the holder, he believed that the currency would never be depreciated.

He thought, however that, as bank-notes must pass from hand to hand in the market, and as in practice most persons—most traders especially—must take them in payment whether they wish to do so or not, some special security might properly be required for their payment. He would have allowed any one who liked to issue bank-notes on depositing Consols to a sufficient amount—the amount, that is, of the notes issued, and an adequate percentage in addition.

Lastly, Mr. Wilson believed that the bank-note circulation exercised quite a secondary and unimportant influence upon prices and upon transactions, in comparison with the auxiliary currency of cheques and credits which has indefinitely augmented during the last thirty years. So far from regarding

the public as constantly ready for an unlimited supply of bank-notes, he thought that it was only in times of extreme panic, when this auxiliary currency is diminished and disturbed, that the bank-notes in the hands of the public either could or would be augmented. He believed that the public only kept in their hands as many notes as they wanted for their own convenience, and that all others were in the present day paid back to the banker immediately and necessarily.

Unfortunately, however, the currency is not discussed in England with very exact reference to abstract principles. The popular question of every thinker is, "Are you in favour of Peel's Bill, or are you against it?" And this mode of discussing the subject always placed Mr. Wilson in a position of some difficulty. He concurred in the aim of Sir R. Peel, but objected to his procedure. He wished to secure the convertibility of the bank-note. He believed that the Act of 1844 indirectly induced the Bank Directors to keep more bullion than they would keep otherwise, and in so far he thought it beneficial; but he also thought that the advantages obtained by it were purchased at a needless price; that they might have been obtained much more cheaply; that the machinery of the Act aggravated every panic; that it tended to fix the attention of the public on bank-notes, and so fostered the mischievous delusion that the augmented issue of paper currency would strengthen industry; that it neglected to take account of other forms of credit which are equally important with bank-notes; that, "*for one week in ten years*"—the week of panic—it created needless and intense apprehension, and so tended to cause the ruin of some solvent commercial men. In brief, though he fully believed the professed object of Sir R. Peel—the convertibility of the bank-note—to be beneficial and inestimable, he as fully believed the special means selected by him to be inconvenient and pernicious.

Opinions akin to Mr. Wilson's, if not identical with them, are very commonly now entertained, both by practical men of business and by professional economists. The younger school of thinkers who have had before them the working of the Act of 1844 and the events of 1847 and 1857, and are not committed by any of the older controversies, are especially inclined to them. Yet from peculiar causes they have not been so popular as Mr. Wilson's other opinions. His views

of finance and of the effect of Free Trade, which were half heresies when he announced them, have now become almost axioms. But the truth of his currency theory is still warmly controverted. The reason is this:—Sir R. Peel's Act is a sort of compromise which is suited to the English people. It was probably intended by its author as a preliminary step; it undoubtedly suits no strict theory; it certainly has great marks of incompleteness; but, "it works tolerably well;" if it produces evils at a crisis, "crises come but seldom;" in ordinary times commerce "goes on very fairly." The pressure of practical evil upon the English people has never yet been so great as to induce them to face the unpleasant difficulties of the abstract currency question. Mr. Wilson's opinions have, therefore, never been considered by practical men for a practical object, and it is only when so considered that any opinions of his can be duly estimated. Their essentially moderate character, too, is unfavourable to them—not, indeed, among careful inquirers, but in the hubbub of public controversy. The only great party which has as yet attacked Sir Robert Peel's Bill is that which desires an extensive issue of inconvertible currency; but to them Mr. Wilson was as much opposed as Sir Robert Peel himself. The two watchwords of the controversy are "caution" and "expansion"; the advocates of the Act of 1844 have seized on the former, the Birmingham school on the latter; the intermediate, and, as we think, juster opinions of Mr. Wilson have had no party cry to aid them, and they have not as yet therefore obtained the practical influence which he never ceased to anticipate and to hope for them. No more need be said upon the currency question,—perhaps we have already said too much; but to those who knew Mr. Wilson well, no subject is more connected with his memory; he was so fond of expounding it, that its very technicalities are, in the minds of some, associated with his voice and image.

But it was not by mere correctness of economical speculation that Mr. Wilson was to rise to eminence. A very accurate knowledge of even the more practical aspects of Economical Science is not of itself a productive source of income. By the foundation of this journal Mr. Wilson secured for himself during the rest of his life competence and comfort, but it was not solely or simply by writing good Political Economy in it.

The organisation of a first-rate commercial paper in 1843 required a great inventiveness and also a great discretion. Nothing of the kind then existed; it was not known what the public most wished to know on business interests; the best shape of communicating information had to be invented in detail. The labour of creating such a paper and of administering it during its early stages is very great; and might well deter most men even of superior ability from attempting it. At this period of his life Mr. Wilson used to superintend the whole of the ECONOMIST; to write all the important leaders, nearly all of the unimportant ones; to make himself master of every commercial question as it arose; to give practical details as to the practical aspects of it; to be on the watch for every kind of new commercial information; to spend hours in adapting it to the daily wants of commercial men. He often worked till far into the morning, and impressed all about him with wonder at the anxiety, labour, and exhaustion he was able to undergo. As has been stated, for some months after the commencement of this paper, he was still engaged in his former business; and after he relinquished that, he used to write the City article and also leaders for the *Morning Chronicle*, at the very time that he was doing on this paper far more than most men would have had endurance of mind or strength of body for. Long afterwards he used to speak of this period as far more exhausting than the most exhausting part of a laborious public life. "Our public men," he once said, "do not know what anxiety means; they have never known what it is to have their own position dependent on their own exertions." In 1843, and for some time afterwards, he had himself to bear extreme labour and great anxiety together; and even his iron frame was worn and tired by the conjunction.

Within seven years from the foundation of the ECONOMIST, Mr. Wilson dealt effectively and thoroughly with three first-rate subjects,—the railway mania, the famine in Ireland, and the panic of 1847, in addition to the entire question of Free Trade, which was naturally the main topic of economical teaching in those years. On all these three topics he explained somewhat original opinions, which were novelties, if not paradoxes then, though they are very generally believed now. To his writings on the railway mania he was especially fond of recurring, since he believed that by his warnings,—warnings

very effectively brought out and very constantly reiterated—he had "saved several men their fortunes" at that time.

The success of this paper, and the advantage which the proprietor of it would derive from a first-hand acquaintance with political life, naturally led him to think of gaining a seat in Parliament, and an accidental conversation at Lord Radnor's table fixed his attention on the borough of Westbury. After receiving a requisition he visited the place, explained his political sentiments at much length "from an old cart," and believed that he saw sufficient chances of success to induce him to take a house there. He showed considerable abilities in electioneering, and a close observer once said of him, "Mr Wilson may or may not be the best Political Economist in England, but depend upon it he is the *only* political economist who would ever come in for the borough of Westbury." Though nominally a borough, the constituency is half a rural one, much under the influence of certain Conservative squires. The Liberal party were in 1847 only endeavouring to emancipate themselves from a yoke to which they have now again succumbed. Except for Mr. Wilson's constant watchfulness, his animated geniality, his residence on the spot, his knowledge of every voter by sight, the Liberal party might never have been successful there. A certain expansive frankness of manner and a wonderful lucidity in explaining his opinions almost to any one, gave Mr. Wilson great advantages as a popular candidate, and it was very remarkable to find these qualities connected with a strong taste for treating very dry subjects upon professedly abstract principles. So peculiar a combination had the success which it merited. In the summer of 1847 he was elected to serve in Parliament for Westbury.

Mr. Wilson made his first speech in the House of Commons on the motion for a Committee to inquire into the commercial distress at that time prevalent. And it was considered an act of intellectual boldness for a new member to explain his opinions on so difficult a subject as the currency, especially as they were definitely opposed to a measure supported by such overwhelming Parliamentary authority as the Act of 1844 then was. Judging from the report in "Hansard," and from the recollections of some who heard it, the speech was a successful one. It is very clear and distinct, and its tone is

very emphatic, without ever ceasing to be considerate and candid. It contains a sufficient account of Mr. Wilson's tenets on the currency—so good an account, indeed, that when he read it ten years later, in the panic of 1857, he acknowledged that he did not think he could add a word to it. At the time, however, the test of its Parliamentary success was not the absolute correctness of its abstract principles, but, to use appropriate and technical language, "its getting a rise out of Peel." Sir Robert had used some certainly inconclusive arguments in favour of his favourite measure, and Mr. Wilson made that inconclusiveness so very clear that he thought it necessary to rise "and explain," which, on such a subject, was deemed at the moment a great triumph for a first speech.

As might be expected from so favourable a commencement, Mr. Wilson soon established a Parliamentary reputation. He was not a formal orator, and did not profess to be so. But he had great powers of exposition, singular command of telling details upon his own subjects, a very pleasing voice, a grave but by no means inanimate manner—qualities which are amply sufficient to gain the respectful attention of the House of Commons. And Mr. Wilson did gain it. But speaking is but half, and in the great majority of cases by far the smaller half, of the duties of a member of Parliament. Mr. Wilson was fond of quoting a saying of Sir R. Peel's, "That the way to get on in the House of Commons was to take a place and sit there." He adopted this rule himself, was constant in his attendance at the House, a good listener to other men, and always ready to take trouble with troublesome matters. These plain and business-like qualities, added to his acknowledged ability and admitted acquaintance with a large class of subjects upon which knowledge is rare, gave Mr. Wilson a substantial influence in the House of Commons in an unusually short time. The Corn Laws had been repealed, the pitched battle of Free Trade had been fought and won, but much yet remained to be done in carrying out its principles with effective precision, in applying them to articles other than corn, in exposing the fallacies still abundantly current, and in answering the exceptional case which every trade in succession set up for an exceptional protection. These were painful and complex matters of detail, wearisome to very many persons, and

rewarding with no *eclat* those who took the trouble to master and explain them. But Mr. Wilson shrank from no detail. For several years before he had a seat in the House, he had been used to explain such topics in countless conversations with the most prominent Free-traders and in the ECONOMIST. He now did so in the House of Commons, and his influence correspondingly increased. He was able to do an important work better than any one else could do it, and, in English public life, real work rightly done at the right season scarcely ever fails to meet with a real reward.

That Mr. Wilson early acquired considerable Parliamentary reputation is evinced by the best of all proofs. He was offered office before he had been six months in the House of Commons, though he had, as the preceding sketch will have made evident, no aristocratic connections—though he was believed to be a poorer man than he really was—though writing political articles for newspapers has never been in England the sure introduction to political power which it formerly was in France—though, on the contrary, it has in general been found a hindrance. In a case like Mr. Wilson's, the prize of office was a sure proof of evident prowess in the Parliamentary arena.

The office which was offered to Mr. Wilson was one of the Secretaryships of the Board of Control. Mr. Wilson related at Hawick his reluctance to accept it, and his reason. Never having given any special attention to Indian topics, he thought it would be absurd and ridiculous in him to accept an office which seemed to require much special knowledge. But Lord John Russell, with "that knowledge of public affairs which long experience ensures," at once explained to him that a statesman, under our Parliamentary system, must be prepared to serve the Queen "whenever he may be called on"; and accordingly that he must be ready to take *any* office which he can fill, without at all considering whether it is that which he can *best* fill. After some deliberation, Mr. Wilson acknowledged the wisdom of this advice, and accepted the office offered him. Long afterwards, in the speech at Hawick to which we have alluded, he said that without the preliminary knowledge of India which he acquired at the Board of Control, he would never have been able to undertake the regulation of her finances.

When once installed in his office, he devoted himself to it with his usual unwearied industry. And at least on one occasion he had to deal with a congenial topic. The introduction of railways into India was opposed on many grounds, most of which are now forgotten,—such as "the effect upon the native mind," "the impossibility of inducing the Hindoos to travel in that manner," and the like; and more serious difficulties occurred in considering the exact position which the Government should assume with regard to such great undertakings in such singular circumstances,—the necessity on the one hand, in an Asiatic country where the State is the sole motive power, of the Government's doing something,—and the danger, on the other hand, of interfering with private enterprise, by its doing, or attempting to do, too much. Mr. Wilson applied himself vigorously to all these difficulties; he exercised the whole of his personal influence, and the whole of that which was given to him by his situation, in dissipating the fanciful obstacles which were alleged to be latent in the unknown tendencies of the Oriental mind; while he certainly elaborated,—and he *believed* that he originally suggested,—the peculiar form of State guarantee upon the faith of which so many millions of English capital have been sent to develop the industry of India.

Besides discharging the duties of his office, Mr. Wilson represented the Government of the day on several Committees connected with his peculiar topics, and especially on one which fully investigated the Sugar question. Of the latter, indeed, he became so fully master that some people fancied he must have been in the trade; so complete was the familiarity which he displayed with "brown muscovado," "white clayed," and all other technical terms which are generally inscrutably puzzling to Parliamentary statesmen. On a Parliamentary Committee Mr. Wilson appeared to great advantage. Though sufficiently confident of the truth of his own opinions, he had essentially a fair mind; he always had the greatest confidence that if the facts were probed the correctness of what he believed would be established, and, *therefore*, he was always ready to probe the facts to the bottom. He was likewise a great master of the Socratic art of inquiry; he was able to frame a series of consecutive questions which gradually brought an unwilling or a hostile witness to conclusions at which he by no

means wished to arrive. His examination-in-chief, too, was as good as his cross-examination, and the animated interest which he evinced in the subject relieved the dreariness which a rehearsed extraction of premeditated answers commonly involves. The examination of Lord Overstone before the Committee of 1848 on Commercial Distress, that of Mr. Weguelin before the Committee on the Bank Acts in 1857, and several of the examinations before the Committee on Life Insurance, of which he was the Chairman, may be consulted as models in their respective kinds. And it should be stated that no man could be less overbearing in examination or cross-examination; much was often extracted from a witness which he did not wish to state, but it was always extracted fairly, quietly, and by seemingly inevitable sequence.

Mr. Wilson continued at the Board of Control till the resignation of Lord John Russell's Cabinet in the spring of 1852. He took part in the opposition of the Liberal party to Lord Derby's Government, and was very deeply interested in the final settlement of the Free Trade question which was effected by the accession of the Protectionist party to office. After a very severe contest he was re-elected for Westbury in July 1852, and on the formation of the Aberdeen Government he accepted the office of Financial Secretary to the Treasury, which he continued to hold for five years, until the dissolution of Lord Palmerston's administration in the spring of 1857, and upon his efficiency in which his remarkable reputation as an official administrator was mainly based.

The Financial Secretaryship of the Treasury is by no means one of the most conspicuous offices in the Government, and but few persons who have not observed political life closely are at all aware either of its difficulty or of its importance. The office is, indeed, a curious example of the half grotesque way in which the abstract theory of our historical Constitution contrasts with its practical working. In the theory of the Constitution—a theory which may still be found in popular compendiums—there is an officer called the Lord High Treasurer, who is to advise the Crown and be responsible to the country for all public monies. In practice, there is no such functionary; by law his office is "in commission." Certain Lords Commissioners are supposed to form a Board at which financial subjects are discussed, and which is responsible

for their due administration. In practice, there is no such discussion and no such responsibility. The functions of the Junior Lords of the Treasury, though not entirely nominal, are but slight. The practical administration of our expenditure is vested in the First Lord of the Treasury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Financial Secretary of the Treasury. And of these three the constitutional rule is, that the First Lord of the Treasury is only officially responsible for decisions in detail when he chooses to interfere in those decisions. Accordingly, when a First Lord, as was the case with Sir R. Peel, takes a great interest in financial questions, the Chancellor of the Exchequer does the usual work of the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of the Treasury has in comparison nothing to do. But when, as was the case in the Governments of Lord Aberdeen and Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister takes no special interest in Finance, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is very fully employed in the transaction of his own proper business, and an enormous mass of work, some of it of extreme importance, falls to the Secretary of the Treasury. Of late years, the growth of the miscellaneous civil expenditure of the country has greatly augmented that work great as it was before. In general, it may be said that the whole of the financial detail of our national expenditure is more or less controlled by the Secretary of the Treasury; that much of it is very closely controlled by him; and that he has vast powers of practical discretion, if only he be a man of ability, industry, and courage.

For such an office as this Mr. Wilson had very peculiar qualifications. He was perfectly sure to be right in a plain case; and by far the larger part of the ordinary business of the Government, as of individuals, consists of plain cases. A man who is thoroughly sure to decide effectually and correctly the entire mass of easy obvious cases, is a safer master of practical life than one eminently skilled in difficult cases, but deficient in the more rudimentary qualification. Nor is the power of certainly deciding plain cases rightly, by any means very common, especially among very intellectual men. A certain taint of subtlety, a certain tendency to be wise above the case in hand, mars the practical efficiency of many men whose conversation and whose powers would induce us to expect that they would be very efficient. Mr. Wilson had

not a particle of these defects. He struck off each case with certain sledge-hammer efficiency, and every plain case at least with infallible accuracy.

It might seem overstrained eulogy—a eulogy which he would not have wished—to claim for Mr. Wilson an equally infallible power of deciding complicated cases. As to such cases there will always be a doubt. Plain matters speak for themselves; they do not require a dissertation to elucidate them: every man of business, as soon as he hears the right decision of them, knows that it is the right decision. But with more refined matters it is not so; as to points involving an abstract theory, like that of the Currency, there will and must be differences of judgment to the end of time. We would not, therefore, whatever may be our own opinion, claim for Mr. Wilson as infallible a power of deciding difficult questions as he certainly possessed of deciding plain questions. But we do claim for him even in such matters the greatest secondary excellence, if, indeed, a secondary excellence it be. Mr. Wilson was perfectly certain to be *intelligible in the most difficult case*. Whether he did right or did wrong, must, as we have said, be from the nature of the subject-matter very arguable. But *what* he did and *why* he did it, was never in doubt for a moment. The archives of the Treasury contain countless minutes from his pen, many of them written with what most men would call rapidity, just while the matter was waiting for decision, and on all sorts of subjects, many of them very complicated ones—yet it may be doubted whether any one of those minutes contains a single sentence not thoroughly and conspicuously clear. The same excellence which has been shown in countless articles in this journal appears in his business-like documents. Wherever his leading articles were written and under whatever circumstances,—and some of the most elaborate of them were written under rather strange circumstances (for he could catch up a pen and begin to write on the most involved topic, at any time, in any place, and, as a casual observer would think, without any premeditation),—but wherever and however these articles might be written, it may be safely asserted that they do not contain a sentence which a man of business need read twice over, or which he would not find easily and certainly intelligible. At the Treasury it was the same. However

complicated or involved the matter to be decided might be,—however much it might be loaded with detail or perplexed by previous controversy,—Mr. Wilson never failed to make immediately clear the exact opinion he formed upon it, the exact grounds upon which he formed it, and the exact course of action which he thought should be adopted upon it. Many persons well acquainted with practical life will be disposed to doubt whether extreme accuracy of decision is not almost a secondary merit as compared with a perfect intelligibility. In many cases it may be better to have a decision which every one can understand, though with some percentage of error, than an elaborately accurate decision of which the grounds and reasons are not easily grasped, and a plan of action which, from its refined complexity, is an inevitable mystery to the greater number of practical persons. But, putting aside this abstract discussion, we say without fear of contradiction or of doubt, that Mr. Wilson added to his almost infallible power of deciding plain cases, an infallible certainty of being entirely intelligible in complicated cases. Men of business will be able to imagine the administrative capacity certain to be produced by the union of extreme excellence in both qualities.

One subsidiary faculty that Mr. Wilson possessed, which was very useful to him in the multifarious business of the Treasury, was an extraordinary memory. On his own subjects and upon transactions in which he had taken a decisive part, he seemed to recollect anything and everything. He was able to answer questions as to business transacted at the Treasury after the lapse of months and even of years without referring to the papers, and with a perfect certainty of substantial accuracy. He would say, without the slightest effort and without the slightest idea that he was doing anything extraordinary: "Such and such a person came to me at the Treasury, and said so and so, and this is what I said to him." And it is quite possible that he might remember the precise sums of money which were the subject of conversation. A more useful memory for the purposes of life was perhaps never possessed by any one. In the case of great literary memories, such as that of Lord Macaulay and of others, the fortunate possessor has a continued source of pleasurable and constantly recurring recollections; he has a full mind constantly occupied with its own contents, recurring to its long loved passages from its favourite

authors constantly and habitually. But Mr. Wilson never recurred to the transactions in which he had been engaged except when he was asked about them; he lived as little in the past perhaps as is possible for an intellectual person; but the moment the spring was touched by a question or by some external necessity, all the details of the past transaction started into his memory completely, vividly, and perfectly. He had thus the advantage of always remembering his business, and also the advantage of never being burdened by it. Very few persons can ever have had in equal measure the two merits of a fresh judgment and a full mind.

Mr. Wilson's memory was likewise assisted by a very even judgment. It was easier to him to remember what he had done, because, if he had to do the same thing again, he would be sure to do it in precisely the same way. He was not an intolerant person, but the qualities he tolerated least easily were flightiness and inconsistency of purpose. He had furnished his mind, so to say, with fixed principles, and he hated the notion of a mind which was unfurnished.

All these mental qualities taken together go far to make up the complete idea of a perfect administrator of miscellaneous financial business, such as that of the English Treasury now is. And Mr. Wilson had the physical qualities also. An iron constitution which feared no labour, and was very rarely incapacitated even for an hour by any illness, enabled him to accomplish with ease and unconsciously an amount of work which few men would not have shrunk from. In the country, where his habits were necessarily more obvious, he habitually spent the whole day from eleven till eight, with some slight interval for a short ride in the middle of the day, over his Treasury bag; and as such was his notion of a holiday, it may be easily conceived that in London, when he had still more to do in a morning, and had to spend almost every evening in the House of Commons, his work was greater than an ordinary constitution could have borne. And it was work of rather a peculiar kind. Some men of routine habits spend many hours over their work, but do not labour very intensely at one time; other men of more excitable natures work impulsively, and clear off everything they do by eager efforts in a short time. But Mr. Wilson in some sense did both. Although his hours of labour were so very protracted, yet if a casual observer

happened to enter his library at any moment, he would find him with his blind down to exclude all objects of external interest, his brow working eagerly, his eye fixed intently on the figures before him, and, very likely, his rapid pen passing fluently over the paper. He had all the labour of the chronic worker, and all the labour of the impulsive worker too. And those admitted to his intimacy used to wonder that he was never tired. He came out of his library in an evening more ready for vigorous conversation—more alive to all subjects of daily interest—more quick to gain new information—more ready to expound complicated topics, than others who had only passed an easy day of idleness or ordinary exertion.

By the aid of this varied combination of powers, Mr. Wilson was able to grapple with the miscellaneous financial business of the country with very unusual efficiency. Most men would have found the office work of the Secretary of the Treasury quite enough, but he was always ready rather to take away labour and responsibilities from other departments than to throw off any upon them. Nor was his efficiency confined to the labours of his office. The Financial Secretary of the Treasury has a large part of the financial business of the House of Commons under his control, and is responsible for its accurate arrangement. The passing a measure through the House of Commons is a matter of detail; and in the case of the financial measures of the Government, a large part of this—the dullest part, and the most unenvied—falls to the Secretary of the Treasury. He is expected to be the right hand of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in all the most wearisome part of the financial business of the House of Commons; and we have the best authority for stating that, under two Chancellors of the Exchequer very different from one another in many respects, Mr. Wilson performed this part of his duties with singular efficiency, zeal, and judgment.

The Financial Secretary of the Treasury is likewise expected to answer all questions asked in the House as to the civil estimates—a most miscellaneous collection of figures, as any one may satisfy himself by glancing at them. Mr. Wilson's astonishing memory and great power of lucid exposition enabled him to fulfil this part of his duty with very remarkable efficiency. He gave the dates and the figures without any note, and his exposition was uniformly simple, emphatic, and intelli-

gible, even on the most complicated subjects. The great rule, he used to say, was to answer exactly the exact question: if you attempted an elaborate exposition, collateral issues were necessarily raised, a debate ensued, and the time of the House was lost.

Mr. Wilson's mercantile knowledge and mercantile sympathies were found to be of much use in the consolidation of the Customs in 1853, and he took great interest in settling a scheme for the payment of the duties in cheques instead of bank-notes, by which the circulation has been largely economised and traders greatly benefited. During the autumn of 1857, his long study of the currency question, and his first-hand conversancy with the business of the City, were valuable aids to the Administration of the day in the anxious responsibilities and rapidly shifting scenes of an extreme commercial crisis. It would be impossible to notice the number of measures in which he took part as Secretary of the Treasury, and equally impossible to trace his precise share in them. That office ensures to its holder substantial power, but can rarely give him legislative fame.

On two occasions during his tenure of office at the Treasury, Mr. Wilson was offered a different post. In the autumn of 1856 he was offered the Chairmanship of Inland Revenue, a permanent office of considerable value then vacant, which he declined because he did not consider the income necessary, and because (what some people would think odd) it did not afford sufficient occupation. It was a "good pillow," he said, "but he did not wish to lie down." The second office offered him was the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade in 1855, which would have been a step to him in official rank, but which would have entailed a new election, and he did not feel quite secure that the electors of Westbury would again return him. He did not, however, by any means wish for the change, as the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade, though nominally superior, is in real power far inferior to the Secretaryship of the Treasury.

In the general election of 1857, Mr. Wilson was returned for Devonport, for which place he continued to sit till his departure for India. He went out of office on the dissolution of Lord Palmerston's administration in the spring of 1858, and took an active part in the Liberal opposition to Lord Derby's Government, though it may be remarked that he carefully abstained from using the opportunities afforded him by his long

experience at the Treasury, of harassing his less experienced successors in financial office by needless and petty difficulties.

On the return of the Liberal party to power, Mr. Wilson was asked to resume his post at the Treasury, but he declined, as after five years of laborious service, he wished to have an office of which the details were less absorbing. He accepted, however, the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade—an office which is not in itself attractive, but which gives its possessor a sort of claim to be President of the Board at the next vacancy. The office of President is frequently accompanied by a seat in the Cabinet, and Mr. Wilson's reputation on all subjects connected with trade was so firmly established that in his case it would have been practically impossible to pass him over, even if it had been wished. He had, however, secured so firm a position in official circles by his real efficiency, that the dispensers of patronage were, as he believed, likely to give him whatever he desired as soon as the exigencies of party enabled them to do so.

He had not been long in office before he had good reason for thinking that he would be offered by the Government the office of Financial Member of the Council of India under very peculiar circumstances. There had never before been such an officer. One member of Council had since 1833 been always sent out from England, but he had always been a lawyer, and his functions were those of a jurist and a regulative administrator, not those of a financier. The mutiny of the Sepoys in 1857 had, however, left behind it a deficit with which the financiers of India did not *seem* to be able to cope, and which a cumbrous financial system did not give them the best means of vanquishing. There was a general impression that some one with an English training and English habits of business would have a better chance of overcoming the most pressing difficulty of India than any one on the spot. And there was an equally general impression that if any one were to be sent from England to India with such an object, Mr. Wilson was the right person. He united high financial reputation, considerable knowledge of India acquired at the Board of Control, tried habits of business, long experience at the English Treasury, to the sagacious readiness in dealing with new situations which self-made men commonly have, but which is commonly wanting in others.

On personal grounds Mr. Wilson was disinclined to accept the office. He was on the threshold of the Cabinet here; he was entitled by his long tenure of office at the Treasury to a pension which would merge in the salary of Indian Councillor; the emoluments of the latter office were not necessary to him; his life was very heavily insured for the benefit of his family; though he had never during his tenure of office at the Treasury been connected directly or indirectly with any kind of commercial undertaking (this journal alone excepted), some investments which he made in land and securities had been very fortunate; since the year 1844 everything of a pecuniary kind in which he had been concerned had not only prospered, but remarkably prospered; he felt himself sufficiently rich to pursue the career of prosperous usefulness and satisfied ambition that seemed to be before him here. There was no consideration of private interest which could induce him to undertake anxious and dangerous duties in India; he even ran some pecuniary risk in leaving this country, as it was possible that in the vicissitudes of newspaper property this journal might again need the attention of its proprietor and founder. On public grounds, however, he believed that it was his duty to accept the office; he took a keen interest in Indian finance; believed that the difficulties of it might be conquered, and thought that in even *attempting* to conquer them he would be doing the greatest and most lasting public service that it was in *his* power to accomplish.

He accordingly accepted the office of Financial Member of the Council of India, and proceeded to make somewhat melancholy arrangements for leaving this country. He broke up his establishment here, bade farewell to his constituents at Devonport and to the inhabitants of his native place; attended some influential public meetings in towns deeply interested in the commerce of India; and on October 20, 1859, left England, as it proved for ever.

Of Mr. Wilson's policy in India it would not be proper to give more than a very brief sketch here. That policy is still fresh in the memory of the public; it has been very frequently explained and discussed in the ECONOMIST; it is still being tried, and, though he was fully persuaded of the expediency of his measures, he would not have wished for too warm a eulogy of them while they are as yet untested by the event. In almost

the last letter which the present writer received from him, there was a sort of reprimand for permitting this journal to draw too great an attention to his plans, and to ascribe the merit of them too exclusively to him, and too little to the Government of which he was a member.

On his arrival in India he found that the Governor-General was on a tour in the Upper Provinces of India, and before doing any business of importance at Calcutta he travelled thither. This journey he thought very advantageous, because it gave him a great insight into the nature of the country, and enabled him to consult the most experienced revenue officers of many large districts on their respective resources, and on the safest mode of making those resources available to the public. He was much struck with the capabilities of the country, and wrote to England in almost so many words 'that it was a fine country to *tax*." On the other hand, however, he was well aware of the difficuty of his task. The only two possible modes of taxation are direct and indirect, and in the case of India there is a difficulty in adopting either. If we select indirect taxation and impose duties on consumable commodities, the natives of India meet us by declining to consume. Their wants are few, and they will forego most of them if a tax can be evaded thereby. On the other hand, if we adopt in India a direct tax on property or income, there is great difficulty in finding out what each man's property or income is. In England we trust each person to tell us the amount of his income, but even here the results are not wholly satisfactory; and it would be absurd to fancy that we can place as much reliance upon the veracity of Orientals as upon that of Englishmen.

These difficulties, however, Mr. Wilson was prepared to meet. On the 18th February, 1860, he proposed his budget to the Legislative Council at Calcutta, and the reception given to it by all classes was remarkably favourable. He announced, indeed, a scheme of heavy taxation, but the Indian public had been living for a considerable time under a sentence of indefinite taxation, and they were glad to know the worst. Anything distinct was better than vague suspense, and, as usual, Mr. Wilson contrived to make his meaning *very* distinct. His bearing also exercised a great influence over the Anglo-Indian public. In England he had been remarkable among official

men for his constant animation and thorough naturalness of manner: in his office he was as much himself as at a dinner-table or in the House of Commons: he had no tinge of supercilious politeness or artificial blandness. In any new scene of action—especially in such a scene as British India—these qualities were sure to tell beneficially. Plain directness and emphatic simplicity were the external qualities most likely to be useful at Calcutta, and these were Mr. Wilson's most remarkable qualities.

The principal feature of Mr. Wilson's Budget was the Income Tax, which he avowedly framed after the English fashion. It is true that but little reliance can, perhaps, be placed on the statements of Orientals as to their wealth. It is very possible that the complicated machinery of forms and notices which is in use here may not be applicable in India. All this Mr. Wilson well knew. But he thought that our Indian subjects should have an opportunity of stating their income before they were taxed upon it. If they should state it untruly, or should decline to state it, it might be necessary to tax them arbitrarily. But he did not think it would be decent—that it would be civilised—to begin with an arbitrary assessment. By the Income Tax Act which he framed, it is enacted that other modes may be substituted if in any instance the English mode of assessment should prove inapplicable. In other words, if our Oriental fellow-subjects will not tell us the truth when they are asked, we must tax them as best we can, and they cannot justly complain of unfairness and inequality. *We* would have been mathematically just, if *they* had given us the means.

The reception of Mr. Wilson's Budget was universally favourable until the publication of the minute of Sir C. Trevelyan, which, as was inevitable, produced a serious reaction. Heavy taxation can never be very pleasant, and in the Presidency of Madras Sir Charles gave the sanction of the Government—of the highest authority the people saw—to the hope that they would not be taxed. The prompt recall of Sir Charles, however, did much to convince the natives of the firm determination of the English Government, and Mr. Wilson hoped that the ordeal of criticism through which his measures had to pass would ultimately be favourable to them. It certainly secured them from the accusation of being prepared in haste, but it purchased this benefit at the loss to the public of much precious

time, and to Mr. Wilson of precious health. Of the substance of this minute it is sufficient to say that its fundamental theory that additional taxation of any sort was unnecessary in India, has scarcely been believed by any one except its author. Almost every one has deemed it too satisfactory to be true.

On another point Mr. Wilson's Budget has been criticised in England, though not in India. It has been considered to be a protective Budget. The mistake has arisen from not attending to what that Budget is. The changes made by Mr. Wilson in the import duties were two. "The first was a reduction from twenty to ten per cent. upon a long list of articles, including haberdashery, millinery, and hosiery, all part of the cotton trade; the second was an increase in the duty upon cotton yarn from five to ten per cent., thus creating a uniform tariff of ten per cent."* Of these two, it is plain the reduction from twenty per cent. to ten was not a change that would operate as a protection to Indian industry; and the increase of the duty on yarn has a contrary tendency. Yarn is an earlier, cloth a later, stage of manufacture, and in Mr. Wilson's own words, "it is a low duty on yarn and a high duty on cloth that encourages native weaving." For the effect of the general system of high Customs duties in India Mr. Wilson is not responsible, but his predecessors. What *he* did has no protective tendency.

If the Income Tax should, as may be fairly hoped, become a permanent part of the financial system of India, it will serve for a considerable period to keep Mr. Wilson's name alive there. So efficient an expedient must always attract the notice of the public, and must in some degree preserve the remembrance of the Minister by whom it was proposed.

Mr. Wilson, however, undertook two other measures of very great importance. One of these has been frequently described as the introduction into India of the English system of public accounts. But it would be more truly described as the introduction of a rational system of public accounts. There are three natural steps in national finance, which are certainly clearly marked in our English system, but which have a necessary existence independent of that recognition. These three are—first, the estimate of future expenditure; secondly,

* "Economist" of September 8, 1860, p. 977.

what we call the Budget, that is the official calculation of the income by which the coming expenditure is to be defrayed; thirdly, the audit which shows what the expenditure has been and how it has been met. The system of finance which Mr. Wilson found in India neglected these fundamental distinctions. There were no satisfactory estimates of future expenditure, and no satisfactory calculation of future income. In consequence, the calculations of the official departments have been wrong by millions sterling, and English statesmen have felt great difficulty not only in saying how the deficit was to be removed, but likewise in ascertaining what the amount of the deficit was. At the time of his death, Mr. Wilson was eagerly occupied in endeavouring to introduce a better system.

Mr. Wilson will likewise be remembered as the first Minister who endeavoured to introduce into India a Government paper currency. On the 3rd March, 1860, he introduced into the Legislative Council an elaborate plan for this purpose, which, with a slight modification by Sir C. Wood—curious in the theory of the currency, but practically not very important—will speedily, it is probable, be the fundamental currency law—the "Peel's Act" of British India.

The exact mode in which Mr. Wilson regarded these great objects, will perhaps be better explained by two extracts from his latest letters than by any other means. On the 4th July he wrote to a friend:—

"Firmness and justice are the only policy for India;—no vacillation, or you are gone. They like to be governed; and respect an iron hand, if it be but equal and just. I have I think more confidence than ever that the taxes will be established and col ected, and without disturbance. But the task is still an enormous one. I must retrench yet at least 3¼ millions, and get the same sum from my *new* taxes to make both ends meet. I am putting the screw on very strongly, but rather by an improved policy in army and police than in reductions of salaries and establishments, which cannot be made. I have set myself *five* great points of policy to introduce and carry out.

"1. To extend a system of sound taxation to the great trading classes, who hitherto have been exempted, though chiefly benefited by our enormously increased civil expenditure.

"2. To establish a paper currency.

" 3. To reform and remodel our financial system, by a plan of annual budgets and estimates, with a Pay Department to check issues, and keep them within the authorised limits,—and an effective audit.

" 4. A great police system of semi-military organisation, but usually of purely civil application, which, dear though it be, will be cheaper by half a million than our present wretched and expensive system,—and by which we shall be able to reduce our native army to at least one-third;—and by which alone we can utilise the natives as an arm of defence without the danger of congregating idle organised masses.

" 5. Public works and roads, with a view to increased production of cotton, flax, wool, and European raw materials.

" The four first I have made great progress in: the latter must follow. But you will call it ' a large order.' However, you have no idea of the increased capacity of the mind for undertaking a special service of this kind when removed to a new scene of action, and when one throws off all the cares of engagements less or more trivial by which one is surrounded in ordinary life, and throws one's whole soul into such a special service, and particularly when one feels assured of having the power to carry it out. I cannot tell you with what ease one determines the largest and gravest question here compared with in England; and I am certain that the more one can exercise real power, there is by far the greater tendency to moderation, care and prudence."

In a second letter, dated the 19th July, he wrote to the same friend from Barrackpore:—

" The Indian Exchequer is a huge machine. The English Treasury is nothing to it for complexity, diversity, and remoteness of the points of action. Our great enemies are time and distance; and with all our frontier territories there is scarcely a day passes that we have not an account of some row or inroad. It is a most unwieldy Empire to be governed on the principle of forcing civilisation at every point of it. One day it is the frontier of Scinde and a quarrel with our native chiefs, which our Resident must check: another, it is an intrigue between Heraut and Cabul, with a report of Russian forces in the background: the next, there is a raid upon our Punjab frontiers to be chastised: then come some accounts of coolness,

or misunderstanding, or unreasonable demands from our ally in Nepaul: then follow some inroads from the savage tribes which inhabit the mountains to the rear of Assam and up the Burrampootra: then we have reported brawls in Burmah and Pegu, and disputes among the hill tribes whose relations to the British and the Burmah Governments are ill defined: then we have Central India, with our loyal chiefs Scindiah and Holkar, independent princes with most turbulent populations, which could not be kept in order a day without the presence of British troops and of the Governor-General's Agent. Besides all these, we have among ourselves a thousand questions of internal administration, rendered more difficult by the ill-defined relations between the Supreme and the Subordinate Governments—the latter always striving to encroach, the former to hold its own. Hence, questions do not come before us simply on their merits, but often as involving these doubtful rights. Then we have Courts of Justice to reform, as well as all other institutions of a domestic kind not to reform alone, but to extend to new territories. Then we have a deficit of 7,000,000*l.*, and had a Government teaching the people that all could be done without new taxes. But unfortunately all, except the taxes, are a present certainty—*they* are a future contingency. What will they yield? I have no precise knowledge. I think from three to four millions a year when in full bloom:—this financial year not more than a million.

"I have now got a Military Finance Commission in full swing: a Civil Finance Commission also going: I am reorganising the Finance, Pay, and Accountant-General's Department, in order to get all the advantage of the English system of estimates, Pay Office, and Audit:—and this with as little disturbance of existing plans as possible. The latter is a point I have especially aimed at. On the whole, and almost without an exception, I have willing allies in all the existing Offices. No attempt that I see is anywhere made to thwart or impede.

"You can well understand, then, how full my hands are, if to all these you add the new currency arrangements, you will not then wonder that my health has rendered it necessary to come down here for a day or two to get some fresh air."

It will be observed that in the last extract Mr. Wilson alludes to his impaired health. For some time after his arrival in

India he seemed scarcely to feel the climate. He certainly did not feel it as much as might have been anticipated. He worked extremely hard; scarcely wrote a private letter, but devoted the whole of his great energies to the business around him. His letters for a considerable time abound with such expressions as "Notwithstanding all my hard work my health is excellent." From the commencement of the rainy season at Calcutta, however, he ceased to be equally well, his state began to arouse the apprehensions of experienced observers, and he was warned that he should retire for a short time to a better climate. He would not, however, do so until his financial measures had advanced sufficiently far for him to leave them. His position was a very peculiar one. In general, if one administrator leaves his post, another is found to fill it up. But Mr. Wilson was a unique man at Calcutta. He was sent there because he had certain special qualifications, which no one there possessed; and, accordingly, he had no one to rely on in his peculiar functions save himself. His presence on the spot was likewise very important. The administration of a department can be frequently transacted by letter, but the organisation of new departments and new schemes requires the unremitting attention of the organiser—the impulse of his energy. The interest, too, which Mr. Wilson took in public business was exceptionally great, and no one who knew him well would suppose that *he* would leave Calcutta while necessary work, or what he deemed so, was to be done there.

Nor was labour the sole trial to which his constitution was exposed. The success of measures so extensive as his, must ever be a matter of anxious doubt until the event decides; and in his case there were some momentary considerations to aggravate that anxiety. There was no experience of such taxation as he had proposed, and the effect of it must therefore be difficult to foresee. Moreover, for a brief period a famine seemed to be imminent in Upper India, which must have disturbed the whole operation of his financial schemes. In his debilitated state of health this last source of anxiety seemed much to weigh upon him.

About the middle of July he went for a week to Barrackpore, near Calcutta. The change was, however, too slight, and, as might be expected, he returned to Calcutta without any material benefit. From that time the disease gradually

augmented, and on the evening of the 2nd August, he went to bed never to rise from it again. For many days he continued to be very ill, and his family experienced the usual alternations of hope and fear. He was quite aware of his critical state, and made all necessary arrangements with his habitual deliberation and calmness.

Lord Canning saw him on the 9th for the last time, and was much struck with the change which illness had made in him. He believed that he saw death in his face, and was deeply impressed with the vivid interest which, even in the last stage of weakness, he took in public affairs, with his keen desire for the success of his plans, and with the little merit which he was disposed to claim for his own share in them.

It was hoped that he would be strong enough to bear removal, and it was intended to delay the mail steamer for a few hours to take him to sea—the usual remedy at Calcutta for diseases of the climate. But when the time came there was no chance that his strength would be adequate to the effort. During the whole of the 11th he sank rapidly, and at half-past six in the evening he breathed his last.

The mourning in Calcutta was more universal than had ever been remembered. He had not been long in India, but while he had been there he filled a conspicuous and great part: he had done so much, that there were necessarily doubts in the minds of some as to the expediency of part of it. No such doubts, however, were thought of now. "That he should have come out to die here!"—"That he should have left a great English career *for this!*"—were the phrases in every one's mouth. The funeral was the largest ever known at Calcutta. It was attended by almost the entire population, from the Governor-General downwards, and not a single voice, on any ground whatever, dissented from the general grief.

Very little now remains to be said. A few scattered details, some of them perhaps trivial, must complete this sketch.

Mr. Wilson's face was striking, though not handsome. His features were irregular, but had a peculiar look of mind and energy, while a strongly marked brow and very large eyebrows gave to all who saw him an unfailing impression of massive power and firm determination.

Mr. Wilson's moral character in its general features resembled his intellectual. He was not a man of elaborate scruples and

difficult doubts, and he did not much like those who were. His conscientiousness was of a plain but very practical kind; he had a single-minded rectitude which went straight to the pith of a moral difficulty—which showed him what he ought to do. On such subjects he was somewhat intolerant of speculative reasoning. "The common sense is so and so," he used to say, and he did not wish to be plagued with anything else.

In one respect his manner did not uniformly give a true impression of him. He always succeeded in conveying his meaning, in stating what he wished to have done and why he wished it: he never failed to convince any one of his inexhaustible vigour and his substantial ability; but he sometimes did fail in giving a true expression to his latent generosity and real kindliness. He shrank almost nervously from the display of feeling, and sometimes was thought by casual observers to feel nothing, when in reality he was much more sensitive than they were. Another peculiarity which few persons would have attributed to him aided this mistake. It may seem strange in a practised Secretary of the Treasury, but he used to say that through life he had suffered far more from shyness than from anything else. Only very close observers could have discovered this, for his manner was habitually impressive and unfaltering. But common acquaintances, sometimes even persons who saw him on business, erroneously imputed to unthinking curtness that which was due in truth to nervous hesitation.

In the foregoing sketch Mr. Wilson has of necessity been regarded almost exclusively as a public man, but his private life has many remarkable features, if it were proper to enlarge on them. His enjoyment of simple pleasures, of society, of scenery, of his home, was very vivid. No one who saw him in his unemployed moments would have believed that he was one of the busiest public men of his time. He never looked worn or jaded, and always contributed more than his share of geniality and vivacity to the scene around him. Like Sir Walter Scott, he loved a bright light; and the pleasantest society to him was that of the cheerful and the young.

The universal regret which has been expressed at Mr. Wilson's death is the best tribute to his memory. It has been universally felt that on his special subjects and for his peculiar usefulness he was "a finished man," and in these respects he has left few

such behind him. The qualities which he had the opportunity of displaying were those of an administrator and a financier. But some of those who knew him best believed that he only wanted an adequate opportunity to show that he had also many of the higher qualities of a statesman; and it was the feeling that he would perhaps have such an opportunity which reconciled them to his departure for India. As will have been evident from this narrative, he was placed in many changing circumstances, and in the gradual ascent of life was tried by many increasing difficulties. But at every step his mind grew with the occasion. *We* at least believe that he had a great sagacity and a great equanimity, which might have been fitly exercised on the very greatest affairs. But it was not so to be.

The intelligence of Mr. Wilson's death was formally communicated by the Indian to the Home Government in the following despatch:—

"To the Right Honourable Sir Charles Wood, Bart, G.C.B., Secretary of State for India.

"Sir,—The painful task is imposed upon us of announcing to Her Majesty's Government the death of our colleague, the Right Honourable James Wilson.

"2. This lamentable event took place on the evening of Saturday, the 11th, after an illness of a few days.

"3. We enclose a copy of the notification by which we yesterday communicated the mournful intelligence to the public. The funeral took place at the time mentioned in the notification; and the great respect in which our lamented colleague was held was evinced by a very large attendance of the general community, in addition to the public officers, civil and military.

"4. We are unable adequately to express our sense of the great loss which the public interests have sustained in Mr. Wilson's death. We do not doubt, however, that this will be as fully appreciated by Her Majesty's Government as it is by ourselves, and as we have every reason to believe it will be by the community generally throughout India.

"5. But we should not satisfy our feelings in communicating this sad occurrence to Her Majesty's Government, if we did not state our belief that the fatal disease which has removed Mr.

Wilson from amongst us was in a great degree the consequence of his laborious application to the duties of his high position, and of his conscientious determination not to cease from the prosecution of the important measures of which he had charge until their success was ensured. Actuated by a self-denying devotion to the objects for which he came out to this country, Mr. Wilson continued to labour indefatigably long after the general state of his health had become such as to cause anxiety to the physician who attended him, and it was within a few days only after the Income Tax had become law, and when, at the earnest request of his medical adviser, he was preparing to remove from Calcutta for the remainder of the rainy season, that he was seized with the illness that has carried him off.

"6. It is our sincere conviction that this eminent public servant sacrificed his life in the discharge of his duty.—We have, &c.,

"CANNING.
"H. B. E. FRERE.
"C. BEADON.

"Fort William, *August the 13th.*"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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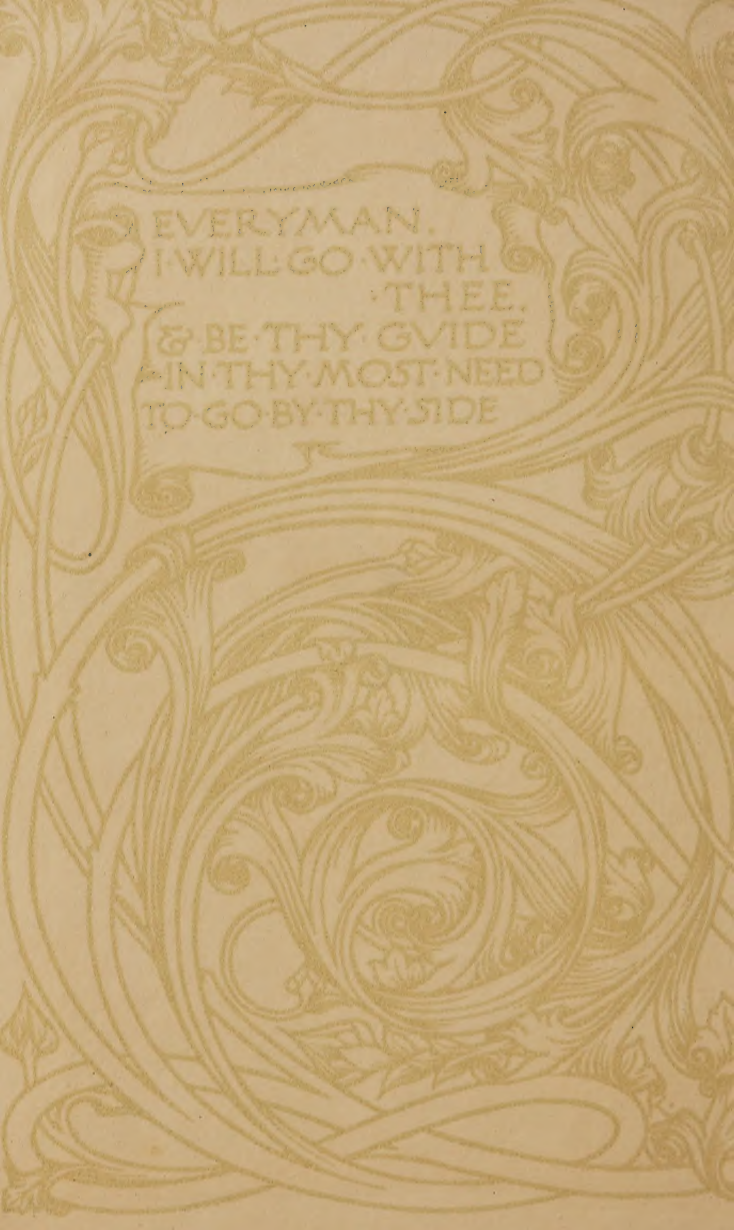
EVERYMAN.
I WILL GO WITH
THEE,
& BE THY GVIDE
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE